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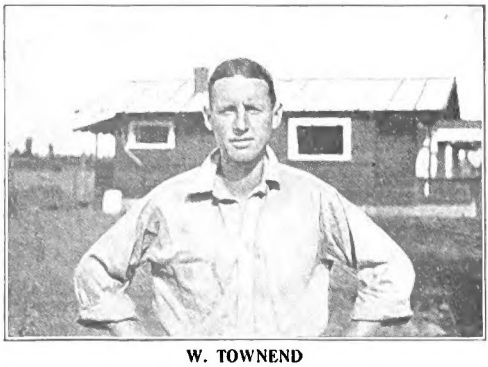

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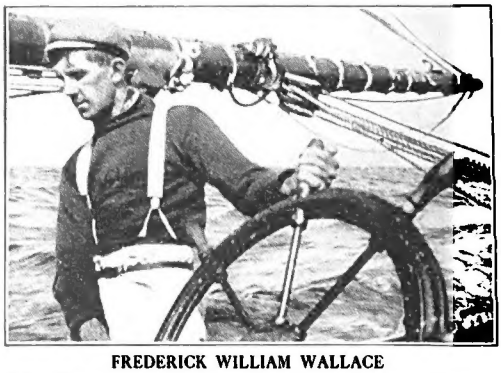

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Fought with Bulgarian chetniks against the Turks before the late war.

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VOL. 9 No. 5

Published by THE RIDGWAY COMPANY
ERMAN J. RIDGWAY, President RAY BROWN, Secretary and Treasurer
Spring and Macdougal Sts. - - - New York City
6, Henrietta St., Covent Garden, London, W. C., England
Entered at the New York Post Office as Second-Class Matter
ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, Managing Editor

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Foreign postage, $1.00 additional. Canadian postage, 30 cents.

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Adventure
Registered in the U.S. Patent Office
March 1915 Vol. 9 No. 5

THE HIGH GRADER

A Complete Book-Length Novel

By WILLIAM MACLEOD RAINE

CHAPTER I

THE CAMPERS

INSIDE the cabin a man was baking biscuits and singing joyously "In My Harem." Outside another whistled softly to himself while he arranged his fishing-tackle. From his book he had selected three flies and was attaching them to the leader. Nearest the rod he put a royal coachman, next to it a blue quill, and at the end a ginger quill.

The cook, having put his biscuits in the oven, filled the doorway. He was a big, strong-set man with a face of leather. Rolled-up sleeves showed knotted brown arms white to the wrists with flour. His eyes were hard and steady, but from the corners of them innumerable little wrinkles fell away and crinkled at times to mirth.

"First call to dinner in the dining-car," he boomed out in a heavy bass.

Two men lounging under a cottonwood beside the river showed signs of life. One of them was scarcely more than a boy, perhaps twenty, a pleasant, amiable youth with a weak chin and eyes that held no steel. His companion was nearer forty than thirty,

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a hard-faced citizen who chewed tobacco and said little.

"Where you going to fish tonight, Crumbs?" the cook asked of the man busy with the tackle.

"Think I'll try up the river, Colter—start in above the Narrows and work down, mebbe. Where you going?"

"Me for the Meadows. I'm after the big fellows. Going to hang the Indian sign on them with a silver doctor and a Jock Scott. The kid here got his three-pounder on a Jock Scott."

The man who had been called Crumbs put his rod against the side of the house and washed his hands in a tin pan resting on a stump. He was a slender young fellow with lean, muscular shoulders and the bloom of many desert suns on his cheeks and neck.

"Going to try a Jock Scott myself after it gets dark."

The boy who had come up from the river's bank grinned.

"Now I've shown you lads how to do it, you'll all be catching whales."

"Once is a happenstance, twice makes a habit. Do it again, Red Haid, and we'll hail you king of the river," Colter promised, bringing to the table around which they were seating themselves a frying-pan full of trout done to a crisp brown. "Get the coffee, Mosby. There's beer in the ice-box, kid."

They ate in their shirtsleeves, camp fashion, on an oilcloth scarred with the marks left by many hot dishes, bringing the appetites of outdoor men who had whipped for hours a turbid stream under an August sun.

DINNER finished, the fishermen lolled on the grass and smoked.

A man cantered out of the patch of woods above and drew up at the cabin, disposing himself for leisurely gossip.

"Evening, gentlemen. Heard the latest?" He drew a match across his chaps and lit the cigarette he had rolled.

"We'll know after you've told us what it is," Colter suggested.

"The Gunnison country ce'tainly is being honored, boys. A party of effete Britishers are staying at the Lodge. Got in last night. I seen them when they got off the train—me lud and me lady, three young ladies that grade up A1, a Johnnie boy with an eyeglass, and another lad who looks like one man from the ground up. Also and moreover there's a cook, a hawss wrangler, a hired girl to button the ladies up the back, and a valley chap to say 'Yessir, coming sir,' to the dude."

"You got it all down like a book, Steve," grinned the red-headed youth.

"Any names?" asked Colter.

"Names to burn," returned the native. "A whole herd of names, honest to Gawd. Most any of 'em has five or six, the way the Denver *Post* tells it. Me, I can't keep mind of so many fancy brands. I'll give you the A-B-C of it. The old parties are Lord James and Lady Jim Farquhar, leastways I heard one of the young ladies call her Lady Jim. The dude has Verinder burnt on about eight trunks, s'elp me. Then there's a Miss Dwight and a Miss Joyce Seldon and—oh yes, a Captain Kilmeny and an Honorable Miss Kilmeny, by ginger!"

Colter flashed a quick look at Crumbs. A change had come over that young man's face. His blue eyes had grown hard and frosty.

"It's a plumb waste of money to take a newspaper when you're around, Steve," drawled Colter in amiable derision. "Happen to notice the color of the ladies' eyes?"

The garrulous cowpuncher was on the spot once more.

"Sure I did, leastways one of them. I want to tell you lads that Miss Joyce Seldon is the prettiest skirt that ever hit this neck of the woods—and her eyes, say, they're like pansies, soft and deep and kinder velvety."

The fishermen shouted. Their mirth was hearty and uncontained.

"Go to it, Steve. Tell us some more," they demanded joyously.

Crumbs, generally the leader in all the camp fun, had not joined in the laughter. He busied himself drawing on waders and buckling his creel.

"We want a full bill of particulars, Steve. You go back and size up the eyes of the lady lord and the other female Britishers," ordered young Lundy, the red-headed lad.

"Go yore own self, kid. I ain't roundin' up trouble for no babe just out of the cradle," retorted the grinning rider. "What's yore hurry, Crumbs?"

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The young man addressed had started away, but now turned.

"No hurry, I reckon, but I'm going fishing."

The range rider chuckled.

"Yo're headed in a bee line for Old Man Trouble. The Johnnie boy up at the Lodge is plumb sore on this outfit. Seems you lads raised ructions last night and broke his sweet slumbers. Why cayn't you wild Injuns behave proper?"

"We only gave Red Haid a chapping because he let the flapjacks burn. He's most of age now and ought to be responsible," answered the fisherman.

"Well, you explain that to Mr. Verinder when you see him. He's sure on his hind laigs about it."

"Some man, Crumbs," commented the cowpuncher as he watched that young man depart. "What's his last name? I ain't heard you lads call him anything but Crumbs."

Lundy answered the question. "His name's Kilmeny—Jack Kilmeny. His folks used to live across the water. Maybe this Honorable Miss Kilmeny and her brother are some kin of his."

"You don't say."

"Course I don't know anything about that. His dad came over here when he was a wild young colt, before Jack was born. Got into some trouble at home, the way I heard it. He bought a ranch out here and married. His family was high moguls in Ireland and they didn't like Mrs. Kilmeny from the Bar Double C ranch. Ain't that the way of it, Colter?"

The impassive gaze of the older man came back from the rushing river.

"You know so much about it, Red Haid, that I'll not butt in with any more misinformation," he replied with gentle sarcasm.

"I'd ought to know!" Lundy retorted promptly. "Jack's father and mine were friends, so's him and me."

"How come you to call him Crumbs?"

"That's a joke, Steve. Jack's no ordinary rip-roaring, hell-raisin' miner. He knows what's what. That's why we call him Crumbs—because he's fine bred. Pun, see. Fine bread—crumbs. Get it?"

"Sure I get it, kid. I ain't no Englishman. You don't need a two-by-four to pound a josh into my coconut," the rider remonstrated.

CHAPTER II

NIGHT FISHING

JACK KILMENY crossed the river by the rope ferry and followed the trail that ran up. He took the water above the Narrows, about a mile and a half from camp. The mosquitoes were pretty bad near the willows along the shore, but as he got out farther they annoyed him less, and with the coming of darkness they ceased to trouble.

Half a dozen eight and nine inch trout went into his creel, but though he was fishing along the edge of the deep water the big fellows would not be tempted. Gradually he worked down to the riffles not far above the Lodge. Here he noticed a fisherman in front of him.

Finding that he was gaining on the other, Kilmeny struck out into the deeper water toward the center of the river. His watch showed him that it was twenty to ten, at the time he came abreast of his unknown companion. As he slipped the watch back into his pocket there came a splash not twenty feet from him, followed by the whirr of the reel as the trout made for the deep water. From the shadows closer to the shore came the click of the line being wound up. In the moonlight there was a flash of silver, and again the rapid whirr of the reel.

"You've hooked a whale, neighbor," Kilmeny called across.

The voice that came back to him over the water was eager and young. Moreover, it was a soprano.

"Must I let him have all the line he wants?"

Kilmeny waded toward her as he gave counsel.

"Don't make it too easy for him, but don't jerk. Keep his nose up if you can."

The humming of the reel and the steady click-click-click of the winding alternated. The trout fought gamely and strongly, but the young woman stuck to her work and would not give him any rest. Jack watched her carefully. He saw that she was tiring, but he did not offer any help, for he knew that she was a sportsman. She would want to win alone or not at all.

Yet he moved closer. The water was up to her hips, and no river in the Rockies has a swifter current than the Gunnison. The bottom, too, is covered with smooth, slippery

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stones and boulders, so that a misstep might send her plunging down. Deprived of the use of her landing-pole, she could make less resistance to the tug of the stream, and the four or five pounds of dynamic energy at the end of her line would give her all she could do to take care of for the next few minutes. Her rod was braced against her body, which made reeling difficult. The man beside her observed that except for a tendency to raise the rod too much she was playing her trout like a veteran.

The thing that he had anticipated happened. Her foot slipped from its insecure rock hold and she stumbled. His arm was around her waist in an instant.

"Steady! Take your time."

"Thanks. I'm all right now."

His right arm still girdled her slight figure. It met with his approval that she had not cried out or dropped her rod, but he would not take the chance of an accident.

The trout was tiring. Inch by inch she brought him nearer. Sometimes he would dart away again, but each dash for liberty was shorter and weaker than the last.

"My landing-net!" she panted presently.

It was caught in the creel. Kilmeny unfastened the net and brought it around where it would be ready for instant use.

"Tell me what I must do now."

"He's hooked pretty fast. Take your time about getting him into your net, and be careful then. These big fellows are likely to squirm away."

It was a ticklish moment when she let go of the rod with her left hand to slip the net under the trout, but she negotiated it in safety.

"ISN'T he a whopper!" she cried in delight. "He won't go into the creel at all."

"Then let me have him. The glory is yours. I'll be your gillie to carry the gamebag."

He got his fingers through its gill before he took the hook from the mouth of the fish. Carrying the trout in one hand and his rod in the other, he waded slowly through the swift water to the shore.

The girl's vibrant voice came to him as she splashed at his heels toward the bank.

"He's such a ripping good one! I'm so pleased. How much do you think he will weigh?"

The young man took the catch far enough back from the river so that they could examine him in safety.

"My guess is six pounds. He's the biggest taken this year so far. I congratulate you."

"I would never have got him if you hadn't been there to show me how. But I really did it all myself, didn't I? If you had touched the rod before I had him netted I'd never have forgiven you," she confessed, eyes glowing with the joy of her achievement.

"It's no joke to land one of these big fellows. I saw you were tired. But it's the sporting thing to play your own fish."

Her dark eyes flashed a questioning glance at him. She had been brought up in a society where class lines were closely drawn. Her experience gave her no data for judging this young man's social standing. In spite of his careless garb he had the look of the thoroughbred. The well-shaped, lightly poised head, the level blue eyes of a man unafraid, the grace with which he carried himself, all denied that he was an uncouth rustic.

They walked together up the slope to the big house. A fishing costume is not a thing of grace, but the one this girl wore could not eclipse the elastic suppleness of the slender figure. The long hip-waders she wore so briskly gave her the look of a modern Rosalind. There was a hint of pleasant adventure in the dusky eyes of this clean-limbed young nymph, a plastic energy in the provokingly dainty face, that stung Kilmeny's reluctant admiration. She had a gift for comradeship.

She ran up the steps of the Lodge lightly and thanked him with a pleasant "Good night."

As he turned away Kilmeny came face to face with another fisherman returning from the sport of the night. He wore a monocle and a faint straw-colored mustache. Altogether he might measure five feet five in his boots.

"I say, my man! Do you belong to the party camped below?" demanded the new arrival in the high-clipped voice of his class.

The guilty man confessed.

"Then what the deuce do you mean by kicking up such an infernal row as you did last night? I couldn't sleep a wink for hours—not for hours, dash it! It's an outrage—a beastly outrage! What!"

Kilmeny looked at him gravely. No

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faintest hint of humor came into the sea-blue eyes. They took in the dapper Britisher as if he had been a natural-history specimen.

"So you'll kindly tell your friends not to do it again," flowed on the man with the monocle smugly.

The young woman stepped forward from the shadows.

"If you please, sir," she added quietly, "Lady Farquhar is rather nervous. Of course we don't want to interfere with your fun, but——"

"There will be no more fireworks at night," cut in Jack. "One of the boys had a birthday and we were ventilating our enthusiasm, but if we had known——"

Dobyans Verinder, the gentleman with the monocle, added a curt clincher.

"Then make sure it doesn't happen again, my good fellow."

Kilmeny looked at him, then at the girl. The dapper little man had been wiped off the map so far as Jack was concerned.

"Did you think we were wild Utes broke loose from the reservation?" he asked. "I reckon we were some noisy. When the boys get to going good they don't quite know when to stop."

"Were they going good last night?" mocked the girl, her eyes sparkling.

"Not real good, ma'am," he drawled. "You see we had no town to shoot up, so we just punctured the scenery. If we had known you were here——"

"You would have come and shot us up," she charged gaily.

Kilmeny laughed.

"You're a good one, neighbor. But you don't need to worry. Young ladies are too seldom in this neck of the woods for the boys to hurt any."

Properly scandalized at this free give and take, Verinder interrupted in the interest of propriety.

"I'll not detain you any longer, my man."

Jack paid not the least attention to him.

"Give the boys a chance and they would be real good to you, ma'am," he promised.

His audacity delighted Moya Dwight.

"Do you think they would?"

Another fisherman stepped into the picture. He was a short, thick-set man, red-faced and white-bearded, unmistakably an Englishman of the upper classes. Verinder addressed him as Lord Farquhar.

"Guess what I've got," demanded the young woman, with her hands behind her.

"Heaven only knows. It might be anything from the measles to a new lover," smiled Farquhar.

She flashed upon him the fish that had been hidden behind her waders.

"By Jove! Catch him yourself?"

The girl nodded. "This gentleman showed me how, but he didn't help a bit. Did you?" She appealed radiantly to Kilmeny.

"Cross my heart and hope to die," said Jack, shaking his head gravely.

Farquhar, very much a sportsman, wanted to know all about it, after which he insisted on weighing the trout. The Westerner was dragged into the Lodge to join in this function, and presently found himself meeting Lady Farquhar, a pleasant plump lady of middle life. Kilmeny had reasons why he did not care to give his own name, so he was presented as Mr. Jack, the first name that came to his mind.

INTO the room drifted presently Miss Seldon, a late novel in her hand. Contrasted with her, Miss Dwight looked like a young girl. There was something very sweet and appealing in Moya's slim, indefinite figure of youth, but most men ceased to look at her when Joyce Seldon swam within the orbit of their vision. For this young woman was frankly a beauty in every line and feature. Her exquisite coloring, the soft amber hair, the long lashes which shaded deep, lovely eyes, all contributed to the effect she produced.

The arrival of Captain Kilmeny and his sister, the latter a pretty Irish girl, quick of tongue, quicker of eye, and ready for any sport to hand, completed the party. They too had been fishing, but with little success.

From the talk Jack gathered that Lord Farquhar and Miss Dwight had bet their catch would outweigh that of the other three, Farquhar and she to fish opposite the Lodge and the others a mile below. Thanks to the big rainbow trout of Moya, the minority party had won easily.

Captain Kilmeny besieged the Westerner with questions as to the kind of tackle to use and the habits of the local trout. He was a spare, wiry man, with the long, clean build one expects to see in soldiers. Long residence in India had darkened his skin to a coffee-brown, except for a wintry apple-red where the high cheek-bones seemed

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about to push through. He was a modest man, quiet and self-effacing, but Jack happened to know that he had won his Victoria Cross for rescuing a wounded soldier under heavy fire.

Lady Farquhar invited the young American to stay for supper, which was served informally in the living-room. The conversation turned on the frontier-day program to be held next day at the little town of Gunnison.

"Since you and your friends are miners, I suppose you'll not take part," Farquhar suggested.

"I used to punch cows. My name is entered for the riding. The boys want me to take a turn," the Westerner replied.

India Kilmeny sat up straight.

"Let's go. We can ride up in the morning. It will be jolly. All in favor of going eat another sandwich."

"Thought we came here to fish," Verinder interposed. "Great bore looking at amateur shows—and it's a long ride."

Verinder, in point of fact, had not come to fish at all. He had inherited millions from his father, made out of a patent medicine that had no merit. Dobyans had set himself stubbornly to get into good society. It happened that neither Moya Dwight nor Joyce Seldon were too well endowed with the goods of this world. It was entirely probable that Joyce, with her beauty and her clear vision of the need of money in the scheme of things, would marry as well as if she had a mother to look after her interests. But Lady Farquhar felt it her duty to see that Moya and she had their chance.

Verinder was a little snob, but at least he was immensely wealthy. So Lady Farquhar had invited him to join their party. She knew that he was ready to propose to any one of her wards who would encourage him. In her private heart she hoped Moya would accept Captain Kilmeny, who had been her suitor ever since the girl had been in short dresses.

"Move we go. What say, Lady Farquhar?" put in Captain Kilmeny.

"Do let's go," begged Moya.

"Don't see why we shouldn't," consented the chaperon. "But I'm like Mr. Verinder about riding so far. If he'll drive me, the rest of you can go on horseback."

Verinder came to time, outwardly civil but inwardly fuming.

"Delighted, 'm sure."

"Time you girls were in bed then," Lady Jim pronounced. "You ll have to get up early."

The Westerner rose to go.

"Night's young yet. Stop and sit in with us to a game of poker. What!" Farquhar invited.

"My pocketbook is at the camp," demurred Jack.

"I'll be your banker," his host volunteered.

The ladies said good night and departed. Chairs were drawn to the card-table, chips sold, and hands dealt. The light of morning was breaking before Kilmeny made his way back to camp. He had in his pockets one hundred seventy-three dollars, most of which had recently been the property of Dobyans Verinder.

An early start for Gunnison had been arranged for by the fishermen at the camp. To go to bed now was hardly worth while. Jack took a towel from the willow bush upon which it was hanging, went down to the river, stripped, and from a rock ten feet above a deep pool dived straight as an arrow into the black water. The swirl of the current swept him into the shallower stream below. He waded ashore, beautiful as an Apollo in his supple slimness, climbed the rock a second time, and again knew the delightful shock of a dive into icy water, fresh from the mountain snows.

Ten minutes later he wakened the camp by rattling the stove-lids.

"Oh, you sluggards! Time to hit the floor!" he shouted.

CHAPTER III

FUGITIVES FROM JUSTICE

AT THE Lodge, too, an early breakfast was held, though it was five hours later than the one at the camp. The whole party was down by nine-thirty and was on the road within the hour. The morning was such as only the Rockies can produce. The wine of it ran through the blood, warm and stimulating. A blue sky flecked with light mackerel clouds stretched from the fine edge of the mountains to the ragged line of hills that cut off the view on the other side.

The horses were keen for the road and the pace was brisk. It was not until half the distance had been covered that Joyce,

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who was riding beside the captain, found opportunity for conversation.

"You sat up late, didn't you?"

"Early," the soldier laughed.

"How did the savage behave himself?"

"He went the distance well. We all contributed to the neat little roll he carried away." Kilmeny smiled as he spoke. He was thinking of Verinder, who had made a set against the miner and had tried to drive him out by the size of his raises. The result had been unfortunate for the millionaire.

"He has a good deal of assurance, hasn't he?" she asked lightly.

The captain hesitated.

"Do you think that's quite the word? He fitted in easily—wasn't shy or awkward—that sort of thing, you know—but he wasn't obtrusive at all. Farquhar likes him."

"He's rather interesting," Joyce admitted.

She thought of him as a handsome untamed young barbarian, but it was impossible for her to deny a certain amount of regard to any virile man who admired her.

Moya Dwight, too, found that the young fisherman flitted in and out of her mind a good deal. He had told her, with his sardonic smile, that he was a working man. Indeed he had said it with a touch of defiance, as if he would not accept their hospitality on false pretenses, but she had noticed he had in him that dynamic spark of self-respect that is at the base of all good manners. In spite of the soft vocal elisions of the West, his speech had a dignity that suggested breeding.

The little town of Gunnison rioted with life. Born and brought up as she had been in the iron caste of modern super-civilization, Moya found the barbaric color of the occasion very appealing. As she looked down on the arena from the box her party occupied, the heart of the girl throbbed with the pure joy of it all. She loved this West with its picturesque chap-clad brown-faced riders. They were a hard-bitten lot, burned to a brick-red by the untempered sun of the Rockies. Cheerful sons of mirth they were, carrying their years with a boyish exuberance that was delightful.

Most of the competitors for the bucking-broncho championship had been eliminated before the arrival of the party from the Lodge. Among the three who had reached the finals was their guest of the previous evening.

"Jack Kilmeny will ride Teddy Roosevelt," blared the megaphone man.

The English officer turned to Farquhar.

"Didn't quite catch the name. Sounded like my own."

"That's what I thought," contributed his sister. A moment later she added—"Why, it's Mr. Jack."

That young man sauntered forward lazily, dragging his saddle by its horn. He saddled the trembling animal warily, then swung lightly to the seat.

THE broncho stood for an instant motionless, then humped itself from the earth, an incarnate demon of action. As a pitcher, a weaver, a sunfisher, this roan had no equal. Its ill-shaped nose and wicked red eyes were enough to give one bad dreams. But the lean-flanked young miner appeared clamped to the saddle. Lithe and sinuous as a panther, he rode with a perfect ease that was captivating.

Teddy tried all his tricks. It went up into the air and came down with all four legs stiff as iron posts. It shot forward in a series of quick sharp bucks. It flung itself against the wall of the arena to crush the leg of this rider who held the saddle with such perfect poise. But Jack Kilmeny was equal to the occasion and more. Even when the brute went over backward in a somersault, he was out of the saddle and in again before the vicious outlaw had staggered to his feet. Even the frontier West had never seen a more daring and magnificent piece of horsemanship.

Captain Kilmeny clapped his hands enthusiastically.

"Bravo! Well done!" he exclaimed, and turned to Moya, who sat beside him. "Finest bit of rough-riding I ever saw. Not one man in a million could have done it."

"It's all in getting the hang of the thing, you know," drawled Verinder complacently.

Moya, who was leaning forward with her dark eyes fixed on the two superb animals fighting for mastery in the arena, thought both comments characteristic. The captain was a sportsman and a gentleman, the millionaire was neither.

"He's as broad-minded as a crab, just about," India whispered in the ear of Moya.

The reference was of course to Verinder.

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"I think we ought to be fair even to a crab, dear," Miss Dwight answered dryly.

The battle between the outlaw broncho and its rider was over. The confidence of Teddy Roosevelt as well as his strength had been shaken. The bucks of the pony were easy to foresee. Presently they ceased. The horse stood with drooping head, foam dripping from his mouth, flanks flecked with sweat-stains.

Kilmeny swung from the saddle, and at the same time Colter stepped into the arena. He drew Jack aside and whispered in his ear. India, watching the rough-rider through field-glasses, saw the face of the young man grow grim and hard. Without the delay of a moment, he pushed through the crowd gathered to congratulate him and walked out of the grounds with Colter.

The other two riders who had reached the finals were both experts in the saddle. One of them, however, had been traveling with a Wild West show and was too soft to hold his own against the bit of incarnate deviltry he was astride. To save himself he had to clutch at the horn of the saddle.

"He's pulling leather," shouted one of the judges, and the man was waved aside.

The third cowpuncher made a good showing, but his horse lacked the energy and spirit of Teddy Roosevelt. The unanimous decision of the judges was in favor of Kilmeny. But when they sought for him to award the prize the new champion was nowhere to be found.

Moya Dwight felt with genuine disappointment that the man's courtesy had failed. She and her friends had applauded his exploits liberally. The least he could have done would have been to make a short call at their box. Instead, he had ignored them. She resolved to bear herself more coldly if they met again.

THE early shadows of sunset were stretching down the rough mountain-sides by the time the visitors from the Lodge reached the river cañon on their homeward way. Soon after this the champion rider and his friend Colter passed them on a stretch of narrow road cut in the steep wall of the gulch. The leathery face of the latter took them in impassively as he gave them a little nod of recognition, but the younger man reined in for a few words.

He accepted their congratulations with a quiet "Glad you enjoyed it," but it was plain that he was in a hurry. In his eyes there was a certain hard wariness that seemed not quite to fit the occasion. Moya could not avoid the impression that he was anxious about something. As soon as he well could, he put spurs to his horse and cantered after his companion.

"I don't like your savage as well as I thought I was going to. If he can't be pleasanter than that, you may keep him yourself, Moya," Joyce announced with a smile.

It was perhaps a quarter of an hour later that the sound of hard riding reached them from the rear. Five dusty, hard-bitten men, all armed with rifles and revolvers, drew level with them. The leader threw a crisp question at Lord Farquhar.

"Two riders pass you lately?"

"Yes."

"One on a big sorrel and the other on a roan with white stockings on the front feet?"

"Yes."

"Say anything?"

"The younger one stopped for a few words. He is a Mr. Jack, camped on the river just below us."

The lank man with the rifle across his saddle-bow laughed grimly.

"It is—not! His name is Kilmeny—Jack Kilmeny. I'm the sheriff of Gunnison County, and I want him bad."

"Did you say Kilmeny?" asked the captain sharply.

"That's what I said—the man that won the broncho-busting contest today."

To Moya, looking around upon the little group of armed men, there was a menacing tenseness in their manner. Her mind was groping for an explanation, but she understood this much, that the law was reaching out for the devil-may-care youth who had so interested her.

"What do you want with him? What has he done?" she cried quickly.

"He and his friend held up the gatekeeper of the fair association and got away with three thousand dollars."

"Held up! Do you mean robbed?"

"That's what I mean—vamosed with the whole proceeds of the show. How long since they passed?"

"Between a quarter and a half an hour," answered Farquhar.

The sheriff nodded.

"All ready, boys!"

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The clattering hoofs disappeared in a cloud of dust down the road.

The rough places of life had been padded for all these young women. Never before had they come so close to its raw, ugly seams. The shadow of the law, the sacredness of caste, had always guarded them.

India turned upon her brother big dilated eyes.

"He said Kilmeny. Who can the man be?" she asked.

"I don't know." He rode absorbed in thought for a minute before he added hesitantly: "You remember Uncle Archie? He had a son named Jack who lives somewhere in Colorado. D'ye remember he came home when you were a little kiddie? Stopped at granddad's."

The girl nodded.

"He fought you once, didn't he?"

"Yes. He was a plucky little daredevil. Suppose this chap—by Jove, it would be strange if he should turn out to be our cousin."

"And a highwayman," added India. "Do you know, Ned, there's something of the thoroughbred about him? He's wonderfully attractive. I do believe it's our Jack. Where does he live?"

"Last I knew he was at Goldbanks."

"And this man is a miner. He said so. And he didn't give us his real name. Why? Because he knew we were his cousins and he did not want to push the claim for some reason—didn't want us to know it."

"Looks like it, sis," nodded the captain. "His mother didn't get along with our people, you know. There was some kind of a family quarrel. It's an odds-on bet this chap is our cousin."

"And now he's a highwayman. By Jove, he doesn't look it," contributed Farquhar.

"I don't believe it. Such nonsense!" flamed Moya.

"Fancy! A real live highwayman to supper with us," Joyce reminded them with sparkling eyes.

"I'm sure he isn't. There must be a mistake."

"He was troubled about something, Moya," Lord Farquhar suggested. "He and his friend were riding fast and plainly in a hurry."

"Didn't he stop to talk?"

"He had to do that to avoid suspicion. I could see his mind wasn't on what he was saying. The man was anxious."

"I thought you liked him," Moya charged scornfully.

"I did," her guardian smiled. "But that isn't evidence that will acquit him in court of being a road agent."

"He's India's cousin — maybe. How could he be a criminal? Shall we have to cut her and Captain Kilmeny now?" Miss Dwight demanded hotly.

The captain laughed, but there was no mirth in his laughter.

"You're a stanch friend, Miss Dwight. By Jove, I hope you're right about him."

DEEP in her heart Moya was not at all sure. What did she know of him? And why should she care what he was? The man was a stranger to her. Forty-eight hours ago she had never seen him. Why was it that every good-looking vagabond with a dash of the devil in him drew on her sympathies? She recalled now that he had hesitated when she mentioned his name, no doubt making up his mind to let her think him other than he was. The sheriff must know what he was talking about when he said the man was an outlaw. But the appearance of him pleaded potently. Surely those clear, unflinching eyes were not the homes of villainy. Nor could she find it possible to think his gallant grace of bearing the possession of a miscreant.

Before the day was out her faith in him had sunk to zero. Captain Kilmeny returned from the camp of the miners with the news that it was deserted except for two of the deputies who had stayed to guard it against the possible return of the robbers. He brought with him the detailed story of the holdup.

Two masked men on horseback had robbed the treasurer of the Gunnison County Fair Association as he was driving to the bank to deposit the receipts of the day. The men had not been recognized, but the description of the horses corresponded closely to those ridden by Kilmeny and Colter. It was recalled that these two men had disappeared as soon as the bucking-broncho contest was over, not half an hour before the robbery. This would allow them just time to return to the corral on the outskirts of the town where they had left their mounts, and to saddle so as to meet the treasurer on his way to the bank.

It happened that the corral was deserted

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at the time, the boy in charge having left to see the finals of the contest. Cumulative evidence of guilt lay in the disappearance from the fishing-camp not only of the two men suspected but also of their companions, Lundy and Mosby.

"Think he really did it, Ned?" India asked her brother.

"Can't say, sis. Looks like it," he answered gloomily.

Of the party at the Lodge only one member was pleased at the turn events had taken. Verinder's manner was as openly triumphant as he dared allow it to become. It cried offensively, "I told you so."

CHAPTER IV

"I'M HERE, NEIGHBOR"

MOYA still rode afternoons with her friends, fished occasionally, and took her regular hand at bridge. But it was unaccountably true that her zest in these amusements was gone. She could give no satisfactory reason for it, but she felt as if something had passed out of her life forever. It was as if the bubbling youth in her were quenched. Whenever she could the girl was glad to slip away by herself. To the charge that she was in love with this young vagabond she would have given a prompt denial. Nevertheless Lady Farquhar recognized the symptoms as dangerous.

On the fifth day after the Gunnison trip the young people at the Lodge made a party to fish Sunbeam Creek. They followed the stream far into the hills, riding along the trail which bordered it. Kilmeny and Verinder carried lunch-baskets, for they were to make a day of it and return only in time for a late dinner.

Moya made her brave pretense of gaicty. With alacrity she responded to Verinder's challenge of a bet on the relative sizes of their catches. But as soon as the rest were out of sight she sat down in a shady spot and fell to musing.

How long she sat there, a sun-dappled nymph upon whom gleams of light filtered through the leaves of the aspens, she had not the least idea. The voice of a grizzled rider startled her from her dreams. Her lifted eyes took in the grim look of the man, garnished with weapons ready to his hands.

"Mornin' miss," he nodded amiably.

"Good morning." And swift on the heels of it, "You are a deputy sheriff, are you not?"

"Rung the bell, ma'am. You belong to the English outfit, I reckon."

She smiled.

"I suppose so, though I don't know what an outfit is."

"I mean to Lord What's-his-name's party."

"Yes."

"Funny about some members of your crowd having the same name as the man we're looking for."

"Mr. Kilmeny, you mean."

"Jack Kilmeny! Yes, ma'am."

"He introduced himself to us, but I don't think the name he went by was Kilmeny. He gave it as Jack."

"Reckon he was lying maybe. Came from the old country, his father did—son of some big gun over there. Likely he's some kin to your friends?"

He put the last observation as a question, with a sharp glance from under his heavy gray eyebrows. Moya chose to regard it as a statement.

"Are you still searching for him?" she asked.

"You bet we are. The sheriff's got a notion he's up in these hills somewheres. A man answering his description was seen by some rancher. But if you ask *me* I'd say he was busy losing himself 'way off in Routt County clear off the map. He used to punch cows up there and he knows all kinds of holes to hide in. It don't stand to reason he'd still be fooling around here. He's bridle-wise and saddle-broke—knows every turn of the road."

"No," Moya assented listlessly. "I shouldn't think he'd be here."

"He had his getaway all planned before ever he came down here. That's a cinch. The fishing was all a bluff. The four of them had the hold-up arranged weeks ago. They've gone into a hole and drawn it in after them."

"Don't you think there's a chance he didn't do it?" she asked in a forlorn way.

"Not a chance. Jack Kilmeny and Colter pulled off the play. What the others had to do with it I don't know."

The deputy passed to the fishing in his conversation, hoped she would have luck, stroked his white goatee, and presently departed.

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THE officer had scarcely disappeared around a bend in the gulch before a sound startled her. Moya turned quickly, to see a man drop down the face of a large rock to the ground. Even before he turned she recognized that panther-like grace and her heart lost a beat.

He came straight toward her, with the smile in his blue eyes that claimed comradeship as a matter of course.

"You—here?" she gasped.

"I'm here, neighbor. Where ought I to be, in Routt County losing myself?"

Her little hand was lost in his big brown fist, her gaze locked in his.

"You heard him?"

"Couldn't help it. I was working down through that grove of pines to the river when I saw him."

"He may come back." Her quick glance went up the gulch into which the deputy had disappeared.

"I reckon not. Let's sit down and talk."

Her first thought had been of his danger, but she remembered something else now.

"No, I think not, Mr. Kilmeny."

The deep eyes that met his steadily had in them the rapier flash. He smiled.

"Because I am a miscreant, I reckon," he drawled.

"You say it, not I."

"Now you're dodging, neighbor. You think it."

"If so, do I think more than the truth?"

A ripple of sardonic laughter stirred in him.

"I see you have me convicted and in the penitentiary already."

"Your actions convict you."

"So *you* think. Isn't it just possible you don't understand them?"

There was the faintest hint of derision in his polite inquiry.

A LIGHT flashed in her dusky eyes, a shining hope newborn in her eager heart.

"Are you telling me that you are innocent?"

"You've been thinking me guilty, then," he countered swiftly.

"What else could I think?"

"You might have waited to hear the defense."

"If you had stayed to make one, but you ran away."

"How do you know I did?"

"You were gone when the officers reached your camp."

His smile was grim and his voice defiant.

"There was a man up in the hills I wanted to see in a hurry."

By the look in her eyes it was as if he had struck her. With fine contempt her answer came.

"Was there another man up there in the rocks just now that you had to see until the deputy left?"

"Anyhow, there was a young woman down by the banks of Sunbeam I wanted to see after he was gone," the fugitive claimed boldly.

A faint angry flush glowed delicately beneath the olive of her cheeks.

"Evasions—nothing but evasions."

She turned away, sick at heart. He had treated with flippancy the chance she had given him. Would an innocent man have done that?

Swift as an arrow his hand shot out, caught her shoulder and held her firmly. The eyes that lifted to his flamed with proud resentment.

"I'm not going to let you go like this. Don't think it."

"Sir!"

"You'll do me justice first." His hand dropped from her shoulder, but the masterful look of him stayed her steps. "You'll tell me what evidence you've got against me."

Again an insurgent hope warmed her heart. Wild he might be but surely no criminal, if there was any truth in faces.

What she had heard against him she told:

"The robbers were riding horses like yours. You left the fair-grounds early. You and your friend were seen going into the corral where you had stabled the animals. This was less than half an hour before the robbery. When you passed us on the road you were anxious about something. You looked back two or three times. Both you and Mr. Colter showed you were in a hurry. Then you ran away before the sheriff reached your camp. Does an innocent man do that?" She put her question as an accusation, but in the voice was a little tremble that asked to be refuted.

"Sometimes he does. Now listen to me. The horses ridden by the robbers were Colter's and mine. We certainly were worried about the time we met you. And we

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did break camp in a hurry so as to miss the sheriff. Does this prove me guilty?"

She brushed away the soft waves of dark hair that had fallen over her forehead in little escaping tendrils. The fearless level eyes of the outdoors West were looking straight at her.

"I don't know. Does it?"

"We'll say this evidence had piled up against Captain Kilmeny instead of against me. Would you have believed him guilty?"

"No. He couldn't have done it."

"On the same evidence you would acquit him and condemn me. Is that fair?"

"I have known him for years—his standards, his ways of thinking. All his life he has schooled himself to run a straight course."

"Whereas I——"

He waited, the sardonic, frosty smile on his lean, strong face.

Moya knew that the flutter of her pulses was telling tales in the pink of her cheeks.

"I don't know you."

"I'm only a working man, and an American at that, so it follows that I must be a criminal," he answered with a touch of bitterness.

"No, no! But you're—different. There's something untamed about you. I don't quite know how to put it, as if you had been brought up without restraints, as if you didn't care much for law."

"Why should I? Law is a weapon to bolster up the rich and keep down the poor," he flung back with an acid smile. "But there's law and law. Even in our class we have our standards, such as they are."

"Now it's you that aren't fair," she told him quietly. "You know I meant nothing like that. The point is that I don't know what your standards are. Law doesn't mean so much to people here. Your blood runs freer, less evenly than ours. You don't let the conventions hamper you."

"The convention of honesty, for instance. Thanks, Miss Dwight."

"I didn't want to believe it, but——"

The penitence in her vivid face pleaded for her. He could not refuse the outstretched hand of this slender lance-straight girl. Reluctantly his palm met hers.

"You're quite sure now that I didn't do it?"

"Quite sure."

"Even though I've been brought up badly?"

"Oh, I didn't say badly—really. You know I didn't."

"And though I'm wild and lawless?"

"Aren't you?" she flashed back with a smile that took from the words any sting they might otherwise have had.

Mirth overflowed in his eyes, from which now many little creases radiated.

"You're a good one, neighbor. But since you will have it, I am. I reckon my standards even of honesty wouldn't square with yours. I live in a rough mining-camp where questions have two sides. It's up to me to play the game the way the other fellow plays it. But we'll not go into that now."

Strong, clear-eyed and masterful, she knew him a man among ten thousand. He might be capable of great sin, but what he did would be done with his eyes wide open and not from innate weakness. Her heart sang jubilantly. How could she ever have dreamed this crime of him? Her trust was now a thing above any evidence.

"And you'll sit down with me now if I ask you, neighbor," he laughed.

She did not wait to be asked, but sat down tailor fashion and looked expectantly up with a humorous little twist of the eyebrows.

With a sigh of content he stretched himself on the sun-warmed loam.

"I'm comforted a heap to know that you believe in me, even if I'm not Captain Kilmeny," he assured her with his low, rippling laugh.

"I might have known the idea of connecting you with such a thing was folly."

He glanced whimsically at her.

"Don't be too sure of me, neighbor. I'm likely to disappoint you. What one person thinks is right another knows is wrong. You'd have to make a heap of allowances for me if I were your friend."

"Isn't that what friendship is for, to make allowances?"

"You're a good little sport," Kilmeny smiled. "And what about your friends? Would they make allowances, too? Would Miss Seldon, for instance? I suppose she thought me guilty, too."

"Hadn't you better ask her that?"

In spite of the indolent ease with which he lay stretched on the grass, Kilmeny's alert eyes had swept again and again the

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trail leading up the gulch. He had not the slightest intention of being caught napping by the officers. Now he jumped to his feet lightly and offered her a hand to rise.

"Your friends are coming, Miss Dwight."

IN ANOTHER moment Moya was standing beside the fugitive, her gaze on the advancing group. Captain Kilmeny, in the lead, was the first to recognize her companion. If he was surprised, he did not show it.

"No, no, Verinder. I had him hooked all right," he was saying. "Poor generalship lost him. I played him all over the shop. He went into the rushes like a shot. Then I persuaded him out into the open. Mr. Trout develops a bad break to the off and heads under a log. Leader snaps, and Mr. Trout has the laugh on me."

India caught sight of Moya.

"How many?" she demanded.

"I haven't been fishing," Moya answered; then gave herself away. "It surely isn't time for luncheon yet."

She took a step toward her friends, so that for the first time Jack Kilmeny stood plainly revealed. India's pretty piquant face set to a red-lipped soundless whistle. Joyce stared in frank amusement. Verinder, rutted in caste and respectability, as only a social climber dubious of his position can be, ejaculated a "God bless my soul," and collapsed beyond further articulation. Captain Kilmeny nodded to the Westerner without embarrassment.

"Mornin', Mr. Jack."

"Good morning. But you have the name wrong."

"Beg pardon?" The captain's eyebrows lifted in inquiry.

"Kilmeny," the American corrected.

Promptly the captain came to time.

"Same name as ours. D'ye happen to be any relation of Archibald Kilmeny, who died in this State about fifteen years ago?"

Jack looked straight at him.

"A son."

"Makes us cousins. He was my father's brother."

"Yes," the miner nodded coolly, not in the least impressed.

It would have been easy to read hostility in his bearing, but India sailed past her brother with hand extended.

"Glad to meet you, Cousin Jack. 'Member me? Last time you saw me I was a squalling five-year-old."

The American warmed a trifle.

"I remember you all right. Never saw a kid more fond of currant jam."

"Still am. You've improved in your personal appearance. Last time I saw your eye it had been beautifully blacked, kindness of Ned."

"Fortune of war. My lip was swollen for a week," her brother laughed as he extended his hand.

"Ned got caned for fighting with a guest. Served him jolly well right," Miss Kilmeny said.

Joyce sailed forward into the picture gracefully. Her radiant beauty took the Westerner's breath.

"You'll stay with us for luncheon," she said with soft animation. "For, of course, this is an occasion. Long-lost cousins do not meet every day."

Verinder, making speechless sounds of protest at this indiscretion, grew very red in the face. Would he have to sit down to eat with a criminal at large?

Jack hesitated scarcely a second. He could not take his gaze from this superb young creature whose every motion charmed.

"Thanks awf'lly, but I really can't stay."

He bowed to one and another, turned upon Joyce that look of dumb worship she had seen on the faces of many men, and swung off into the pines, as elastic-heeled, confident and competent a youth as any of them had seen in many a day.

India's eyes danced. She was Irish enough to enjoy a situation so unusual.

"Snubbed, Joyce, by a highwayman," she laughed.

But Joyce merely smiled. She knew what she knew.

"If you ask me, he's got the deuce of a cheek, you know," Verinder fumed.

Miss Kilmeny pounced instantly upon him.

"Referring to our cousin, Mr. Verinder?" she demanded sweetly.

"But—er—you said yourself——"

"That was all in the family," she informed him promptly.

Joyce came to the assistance of Verinder with one confidential glance of her incredibly deep eyes of velvet.

"Of course he's cheeky. How could he be India's cousin and not be that?" she

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asked with a rippling little laugh. "Come and help me spread the tablecloth, Mr. Verinder."

Profoundly grateful, the millionaire flew to assist.

CHAPTER V

MOYA'S HIGHWAYMAN

DINNER at the Lodge was just finished. It was the one hour of the day when anything like formality obtained. Each one dropped in to breakfast when he or she pleased. Luncheon rarely found them together. But Lady Jim insisted that dinner should be a civilized function. Unless there was to be night fishing, the whole party usually adjourned from the dining-room to the river-front porch, where such members of it as desired might smoke the postprandial cigar or cigarette. Tonight nobody cared to get out rod and line. In an hour or so they would return to the living-room for bridge.

Voices drifted up the trail, and presently riders came into sight. They halted among the trees, where one dismounted and came forward, his trailing spurs jingling as he walked.

He bowed to his audience in general, and again and more particularly to Lady Farquhar.

"Evening, ma'am. My name's Gill, sheriff of this county. I hate to trouble you, but my men haven't had a bite to eat since early this mo'ning. Think we could get a snack here? We'll not get to Gunnison till most eleven."

Lady Farquhar rose.

"I'll have the cook make something for you. How many?"

"Six. Much obliged. Just anything that's handy."

Sheriff Gill beckoned to the men in the trees, who tied their horses and presently came forward. All but one of them were heavily armed. That one walked between a thirty-thirty and a thirty-two special carbine. It was observable that the men with the rifles did not lift their eyes from him.

Moya felt her heart flutter like that of a caged bird. The blood ebbed from her lips and she swayed in her seat. The prisoner was Jack Kilmeny. Farquhar, sitting beside the girl, let his hand fall upon hers with a comforting little pressure.

"Steady," his voice murmured so that she alone heard.

Yet his own pulse stirred with the sheer melodrama of the scene. For as the man came forward it chanced that the luminous moonbeams haloed like a spotlight the blond head and splendid shoulders of the prisoner. Never in his gusty lifetime had he looked more the vagabond enthroned. He was coatless, and the strong muscles sloped beautifully from the brown throat. A sardonic smile was on the devil-may-care face, and those who saw that smile labeled it impudent, debonair, or whimsical as fancy pleased.

"By Jove, the fellow's a natural-born aristocrat," thought Farquhar, the most democratic of men.

Jack Kilmeny nodded with cool equality toward Farquhar and the captain, ignored Verinder, and smiled genially at India. For Moya his look had a special meaning. It charged her with the duty of faith in him. Somehow, too, it poured courage into her sinking heart.

"Afraid an engagement at Gunnison with Sheriff Gill won't let me stop for any poker tonight," he told his host.

Farquhar was on the spot to meet him in the same spirit.

"Verinder will be glad of that. I fancy my pocketbook, too, will be fatter tomorrow morning."

BIGGS appeared, to take the newly arrived party in charge. As they started to follow him the prisoner came face to face with Joyce who was just coming out of the house. She looked at the young miner and at the rifles, and her eyes dilated. Under the lowered lights of evening she seemed to swim in a tide of beauty, rich and mellow. The young man caught his breath at the sheer pagan loveliness of her.

"What is it?" she asked in a low, sweet, tremulous voice.

His assurance fled. The bravado was sponged from his face instantly. He stared at her in silence, fascinated, until he moved forward at the spur of an insistent arm at his elbow.

India wondered how Lady Jim would dispose of the party. Jack Kilmeny might be a criminal, but he happened to be their cousin. It would hardly do to send him to the servants' quarters to eat. And where

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he ate the sheriff and his posse would likewise have to dine.

The young woman need not have concerned herself. Lady Farquhar knew enough of the West and its ways not to make a mistake. Such food as could be prepared at short notice was served in the dining-room.

Having washed the dust of travel from himself, the sheriff returned to the porch to apologize once more for having made so much trouble.

Farquhar diverted him from his regrets by asking him how they had made the capture.

"I ain't claiming much credit for getting him," Gill admitted. "This here was the way of it. A kid had been lost from Landor's ranch—strayed away in the hills, y'understand. She was gone for forty-eight hours, and everybody in the district was on the hunt for her. Up there the mountains are full of pockets. Looked like they weren't going to git her. Soon it would be too late even if they did find her. Besides, there are a heap of mountain lions up in that country. I tell you her folks were plumb worried."

Moya, listening to every word as she leaned forward, spoke vividly.

"And Mr. Kilmeny found her."

The sheriff's surprised eyes turned to her.

"That's right, ma'am. He did. I dunno how you guessed it, but you've rung the bell. He found her and brought her down to the ranch. It just happened we had dropped in there ten minutes before. So we gathered him in handy as the pocket in your shirt. Before he could move we had the crawl on him."

The sheriff retired to the dining-room, whence came presently snatches of cheerful talk between the prisoner and his captors. In their company Jack Kilmeny was frankly a Western frontiersman.

"You passed close to me Wednesday night at the fork of Rainbow above the J K ranch. I was lying on a ledge close to the trail. You discussed whether to try Deer Creek or follow Rainbow to its headwaters," the miner said.

"That was sure one on us. Hadn't been for the kid, I don't reckon we ever would have took you," a deputy confessed.

"What beats me is why you weren't a hundred miles away in Routt County over in yore old stamping ground," another submitted.

"I had my reasons. I wasn't looking to be caught anyhow. Now you've got me you want to watch me close," the prisoner advised.

"We're watching you. Don't make any mistake about that and try any fool break," Gill answered, quite undisturbed.

"He's the coolest hand I ever heard," Farquhar said to the party on the porch. "If I were a highwayman, I'd like to have him for a partner."

"He's not a highwayman, I tell you!" corrected Moya.

"I hope he isn't, but I'm afraid he is," India confided in a whisper. "But whatever else he is, Jack Kilmeny is a man."

"Very much so," the captain nodded between troubled puffs of his pipe.

"And I'm going to stand by him," announced the captain's sister with a determined toss of her pretty head.

Moya slipped an arm quickly around her waist. She was more grateful for this support than she could say. It meant that India, at least, had definitely accepted the American as a relative with the obligation that implied. Both girls waited for Ned Kilmeny to declare himself, for, after all, he was the head of the family. He smoked in silence for a minute, considering the facts in his stolid, deliberate fashion.

The excitement of the girl he loved showed itself in the dusky eyes sparkling beneath the soft mass of blue-black hair, in the glow of underlying blood that swept into her cheeks. She hoped—oh, how she hoped—that the officer would stand by his cousin. In her heart she knew that if he did not—no matter how right his choice might be in principle—she never would like him so well again. He was a man who carried in his face and in his bearing the note of fineness, of personal distinction, but if he were to prove a formalist at heart, if he were going to stickle for an assurance of his kinsman's innocence before he came to the prisoner's aid, Moya would have no further use for him.

WHEN the sheriff presently came out, Captain Kilmeny asked him if he might have a word with the prisoner.

"Sure. Anything you want to say to him."

The English officer drew his cousin aside and with some embarrassment tendered to

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him the use of his purse in the event it might be needed for the defense.

Jack looked at him steadily with hard, unflinching eyes.

"Why are you offering this, Captain?"

"I don't quite follow you."

"I mean, what's your reason? Don't like it to get out that you have a cousin in the pen, is that it? Anxious to avoid a family scandal?" he asked, with almost a sneer.

The captain flushed, but before he could answer India flamed out—

"You might have the decency to be ashamed of that, Jack Kilmeny."

Her cousin looked at the girl gravely, then back at her lean, clean-faced brother.

"I am. Beg your pardon, Captain. As for your offer, I would accept it if there were any need. But there isn't. The charges against me will fall flat."

"Deuced glad to hear it. Miss Dwight has just been telling us it would be all right."

India looked straight at Jack out of the steel-blue eyes that were so like his own.

"I wasn't so sure of it myself, but Moya was. Nothing could shake her. She's a good friend."

"I had it sized up about that way," the miner replied. "But I've a notion Miss Kilmeny will stand the acid, too. Anyhow, I'm much obliged to her."

The prisoner shook hands with both of his cousins, lifted a broad-rimmed, gray felt hat from the rack, and delivered himself to the sheriff.

"All right, Gill."

India gave a little exclamation and moved toward the hatrack. Her hand fell upon a second hat, similar in appearance to the first, but much more worn and dust-stained. She opened her lips to speak and closed them without saying a word. For her eyes had met those of Moya and read there a warning.

Jack Kilmeny nodded a brisk farewell to Farquhar, smiled at Miss Dwight, and moved with his guards to the clump of trees where the horses had been left. His eyes had looked for Joyce, but she was not at that moment in sight.

The last faint beat of the retreating hoofs died away. An awkward constraint settled upon the party left at the Lodge. It was impossible to discuss the situation openly, yet it was embarrassing to ignore the subject in the thoughts of all. After a decent interval they began to drop away one by one from the group. India followed Moya and found that young woman in her room.

"What are you hiding?" Miss Kilmeny asked quickly.

Moya produced from her hatbox a gray sombrero and put it on the table.

"I didn't know it was you—thought it might be Lady Jim," she explained.

"Why wasn't I to tell Jack Kilmeny that he had taken Ned's hat by mistake?" India wanted to know.

"Because it wasn't by mistake."

"Not by mistake? What would he want with another man's hat?"

"I'm not sure about that. Perhaps he didn't want his own. You see I had started myself to tell him about the mistake, but his eyes asked me plain as words not to speak."

"But why—why?" India frowned at the hat, her active brain busy. "It would be absurd for him to want Ned's hat. He must have had some reason, though."

"Don't they search prisoners before they lock them up?" Moya asked abruptly.

India shook her head.

"I don't know. Do they?"

"Of course they do." Moya's eyes began to shine. "Now suppose there is something about that hat he didn't want them to see."

"What do you mean?" India picked up the hat and turned it around slowly. "It's worn and a bit disreputable, but he wouldn't care for that."

MOYA found a pair of scissors in her work-basket. With these she ripped off the outer ribbon. This told her nothing. Next she examined the inside. Under the sweat-pad was a folded slip of paper. She waved it in excitement.

"What did I tell you?"

"But—if he is innocent—what could there be he wanted to hide?"

"I don't know." Moya unfolded the paper enough to see that there was writing in it. "Do you think we ought to read this?"

"I don't know," India repeated in her turn. "Perhaps it may be a message to you."

Moya's face lighted.

"Of course that's it. He wanted to tell us something when the rest were not there, so he used this method."

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Three cramped lines were penciled on the torn fragment of paper.

At wharf above camp.
Twelve steps below big rock.
In gunny-sack three yards from shore.

Two pairs of puzzled eyes looked into each other.

"What can it mean?" India asked.

"I don't know, unless——"

"Unless what?"

"Can't it be a direction for finding something?"

"But what? And why should it be hidden in his hat? Besides, he would have no chance to put it in there after he was captured."

"Then perhaps it isn't a message to me at all."

"That's what we must find out. 'At wharf above camp.' That probably means his fishing-camp."

"What are you going to do, India?"

"I'm going to get Ned to help me find that gunny-sack."

Moya found herself trembling. She did not know why. It was not doubt of her reckless friend, but none the less she was in a panic.

"Do you think we'd better?"

Miss Kilmeny looked at her in surprise. In general nobody came to decision more quickly than Moya.

"Of course. How else can we tell whether it is something he wants us to do for him?"

"When shall we look?"

"The sooner the better—tonight," answered the other girl immediately. "The wharf above the camp. It's not a quarter of an hour from here. I'll not sleep till I know what he means."

"Lady Jim," Moya reminded her.

"She needn't know. She can't object if we take Ned and go fishing for an hour."

Moya consulted her watch.

"They'll be gathering for bridge pretty soon. Let's go now. We can be back in time for supper."

"Get into your fishing togs. I'll get Ned and we'll meet you on the west porch in a quarter of an hour."

WITHIN the appointed time the three slipped away down the river-bank trail as silently as conspirators. The captain was rather inclined to pooh-pooh the whole thing, but he was not at all sorry to share an adventure that brought him into a closer relationship with Moya Dwight.

"Must be this wharf," India said presently, as a bulky shadow loomed out of the darkness.

"Shouldn't wonder. Here's a big rock just below it. Didn't the paper say something about a rock?" asked the captain.

"Twelve steps below big rock, it says."

The soldier paced off the distance.

"What now?"

"Three yards from the shore," called his sister. "There should be a gunnysack, whatever that is."

"Afraid he's spoofing us," Kilmeny said with a laugh as he moved out in his waders against the current. "Here I am. What's the next direction?"

India giggled. She was Irish enough to get the humorous side of things, and could not help being frivolous even when she was greatly interested.

"Now you look over your left shoulder at the moon and wish."

"I say," her brother's high voice cut in, "my foot's kicking something. Wait a jiff!"

He braced his feet, dived suddenly down with one arm till his face touched the water, and grappled with his fingers for a hold on something lying between two rocks at the bottom. When he straightened again it was with an effort. He did not attempt to raise his burden from the stream but waded ashore with it. Using both hands, he dragged his find to land.

"It's a sack," India cried excitedly.

The captain's eyes met those of Moya. His face was grave, but she was white to the lips. Both of them felt sure of what they would find in the sack.

"Open it," she told him tensely.

With his pocket-knife Kilmeny cut the string that tied the sack. He drew out a small, heavy valise, so full that it gaped. Silver and gold coins, as well as bills, filled it to the mouth. They had found the treasure stolen from the treasurer of the Gunnison County Fair Association.

All three of them were sick at heart. Jack Kilmeny then was guilty after all. The message in the hat had not been intended for them, but had been merely a note of identification of the spot. He had taken the captain's hat merely because he did not want the officers to find the direc-

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tions under the sweat-pad. He had in essence lied to Moya and to the cousins who had offered to stand shoulder to shoulder with him in his trouble.

To Moya the next hour was a nightmare. They returned to the Lodge and slipped into the house by way of a French window, opening upon the deserted north porch. Kilmeny hid the sack of treasure in his trunk and divested himself of his fishing-clothes. Presently he joined Moya and his sister on the front porch, where they were discovered suddenly by Verinder, in search of a fourth at bridge.

India, knowing how greatly her friend was shaken, volunteered to fill the table and maneuvered Verinder back into the living-room with her. The millionaire had vaguely the sense of a conspiracy against him and resented it, even though of late he had been veering from Moya to Joyce in his attentions.

CAPTAIN KILMENY, left alone with the girl of his dreams, wisely said nothing. He was himself indignant, his family pride stung to the quick. His cousin was not only a thief but a liar. Born of a race of soldiers, with the traditions of family and of the army back of him for generations, the latter offense was to Ned Kilmeny the greater of the two.

He understood something of how Miss Dwight felt. She had let herself become greatly interested in this vagabond cousin of his. Openly she had championed his cause. Now her feelings were wounded, her pride hurt and her anger ablaze. The fellow's offense against her had been flagrant.

So far the captain had guessed correctly. Moya writhed like a bruised woodland creature. Her friendship had been abused. She had been as credulous as a simple country wench, while he no doubt had been laughing up his sleeve at her all the time. No longer had she any doubt as to his guilt. She visualized the hurried run for safety to camp, the swift disposal of the treasure in the river because of the close pursuit. When she lived over again that scene on Sunbeam the girl flogged her soul like a penitent. As one grinds defiantly on an ulcerated tooth, so she crushed her pride and dragged it in the dust.

Kilmeny, sitting beside her in the deep shadows cast by the wild cucumber vines, became aware that she was weeping silently His heart bled for her.

"I say, don't," he pleaded. It was impossible for him to voice adequately his feelings. Greatly daring, he let an arm rest across the shoulders that were being racked by suppressed *pianissimo* sobs.

"You mustn't, you know. I can't stand it," he said. And again, "Please don't!"

She gulped down the lump in her throat and turned upon him filmy eyes, the lashes of which were tangled with tears. This fine, strong soldier represented the haven of rest toward which she was being driven. Had she never met his American cousin she knew that she would probably have accepted him in the end. The swift impulse swept her to anchor her craft for life in a safe harbor. She had tried rebellion, and that had left her spent and beaten. What she wanted now was safety, a rest from the turmoil of emotion.

"Do you still—want me?" she asked lifelessly.

He could not on the instant take her meaning.

"Want you!" he cried in a low voice no words could have expressed fully. "Want you? Oh, my dear!"

"You know I don't love you—not in one way," she told him naively. "Lady Jim says that will come. I don't know. Perhaps you won't want to take the risk."

She could see the desire of her leap to his honest eyes.

"I'll take my chance," he cried.

"You'll give me all the time I want?"

"You shall set your own time."

Her dusky head was leaning wearily against the back of a wicker porch-chair. From sheer fatigue her eyes fluttered shut. Her lover could see the round birdlike throat swell as she swallowed the lump that had gathered. Pity for her and love of her rose in him like a flood. He would have given anything to wrap her in his arms and fight away her troubles. But he knew it would be months before he could win the right to do this.

"Would you mind if—if we didn't tell the others just yet?"

"It shall be as you say, Moya dear."

She nodded languid thanks.

"You're good. I—I think I'll go to bed. I'm so tired."

He kissed the tips of her fingers, and she vanished around the corner of the house.

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Kilmeny sat down again and looked for long across the moonlit river. His sweetheart had promised to marry him, but in how strange a fashion. He was to be her husband some day, but he was not yet her lover by a good deal. His imagination fitted another man to that rôle, and there rose before him the strong brown face of his cousin, with its mocking eyes and devil-may-care smile.

His promised wife! He had despaired of winning her, and she had crept to him as a hurt child does to its mother. There was no exultation in his heart. Poor child! How sad and tired her eyes had been.

CHAPTER VI

THE BAD PENNY AGAIN

MOYA sat on a mossy rock with a magazine in her hand, but she was not reading. Her thoughts were full of the man who had betrayed her trust in him, who had used her for his own purposes to help him hoodwink the sheriff. A picture of that lean, tanned face flashed before her in imagination, and she found it hard to believe that the level, fearless eyes could shelter treachery.

Behind her the alder bushes stirred. She heard a soft footfall and turned her head. Smiling down upon her were the blue eyes in the brown sardonic face of Jack Kilmeny.

With a little cry she sprang to her feet and stared at him, one hand on her fast-beating heart.

"You!" she cried.

He bowed.

"The bad penny turned up again, Miss Dwight."

"What are you doing here? How did you become free? Have you escaped?"

"One question at a time, Miss Dwight. I am calling on a charming young woman. That is the answer to your first."

There was in his manner an airy ease that under the circumstances seemed to her insufferable. Scorn of him flashed in her dark eyes. She stood straight and rigid, but in spite of herself she breathed fast.

"You've broken from prison! You are a fugitive again," she charged.

He burlesqued alarm after the fashion of melodrama.

"Save me from my pursuers, lady. For the love of heaven, hide me!"

Moya drew back from him without speaking. The laughter faded from his face.

"You've forgotten your promise. You've lost faith again," he told her.

"I know you now, sir," she answered with fine contempt.

"And you promised to believe in me." He said it quietly, with just a touch of bitterness in the reproach of his wistful voice.

The first hint of startled doubt came into her eyes. She stood poised as if on the edge of hope.

"How could I believe when we found your guilt on you? What right have you to ask it?"

"Meaning the paper in the hat?"

"Yes."

"I wasn't sure whether you'd look for it or not."

"We thought perhaps it was a message to us."

"So you looked—and now you are certain of my guilt, I reckon."

"Yes."

He laughed softly to himself.

"Give a dog a bad name and hang him. What else could you expect, anyhow, of a barbarian of the Rocky Mountains?"

Almost with a sneer he said it, but into her heart came a resurgent glow. Was it possible that after all he could be innocent? She did not see how that could be, and yet against the perilous and emotional climax which was growing on her she set her will in vain. Why was it that the mere presence of this man called to her so potently and shook her confidence in his guilt?

"We found the money," she explained, thinking to confound him.

"I guessed that. It was gone when I went to look for it this morning. I've come for it now."

His assurance amazed her.

"Come for it," she repeated. "It isn't here."

"No, I didn't expect to find it in your purse. But it is at the Lodge."

"No."

"Where then?"

"I sha'n't tell you. The money will be returned to those from whom it was stolen."

He looked at her with hard, narrowed eyes.

"It will be returned, will it? When?"

"Today. Within a few hours."

"Who is going to return it?"

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Moya had it on the tip of her tongue to tell, but pulled up in time.

"I think we'll not go into that."

THE American looked at his watch. The hands showed the hour to be two-thirty. If the money were to be returned that day, some one must already be on the way with it. He had seen his cousin, Captain Kilmeny, take the Gunnison road in a trap not half an hour earlier.

"So the captain is taking it back today," he mused aloud, wary eyes on Moya's face.

A startled expression leaped to her countenance. She had told more than she had intended.

"I didn't say so."

"I say so!"

Beneath his steady gaze her lashes fell. He nodded, sure that he had guessed correctly.

"I intended to have a talk with you and straighten out some things," he went on. "But I find I haven't time now. We'll postpone it till tomorrow. I'll meet you here at ten o'clock in the morning."

"No," she told him.

The wave of hope had ebbed in her. Given the opportunity to explain the evidence against him, he had cared more to find out what they were doing with the stolen money. He had no time to save his good name.

"Ten in the morning. Remember. It's important. I want to see you alone. If I'm not on time, wait for me."

That was his last word. He bowed, turned away almost at a run, and was lost in the small willows. Presently she heard the sound of a galloping horse. A minute later she caught a glimpse of it disappearing up Red Rock cañon. He was following the cut-off trail that led to Gunnison.

She wondered what was taking him away so abruptly. He had meant to stop, then had changed his mind. He had told her calmly she must meet him here tomorrow, and if he were late for the appointment she must wait. His impudence was enough to stagger belief. She would show him about that. If he wanted to see her, he must come to the Lodge and face Lady Jim. Even then she would not see him. Why should she, since he was what he was?

Ah, but that was the crux of the whole matter. To look at him was to feel that whatever his faults they were not despicable ones. He was alive, so very much alive, and the look of him was that which an honest man should have. Had he proven his innocence and been released? Or had he broken prison, an alternative of which he was quite capable? And, guilty or innocent, what could be the explanation of his extraordinary demand that she should turn over to him the stolen money?

He had found her dumb and stricken with many hours of brooding over his guilt. At least he left her quick with questionings. She divined again the hint of a mystery. Something deeper than reason told her that the unraveling of it would prove him no villain.

CHAPTER VII

"AN OUT-AND-OUT ROTTER"

JACK strode through the young alders to his horse, swung to the saddle without touching the stirrups and was off instantly at a canter. He rode fast, evidently with a direct, driving purpose to reach a particular destination. The trail was a rough and rocky one, but he took it recklessly. His sure-footed broncho scrambled catlike up steep inclines and slid in clouds of dust down breakneck hillsides of loose rubble. In and out he wound, across gulches and over passes, following always as nearly a bee-line as was possible.

An hour of rapid travel brought him to the Gunnison road. He swung to the ground and examined the dusty roadbed. Apparently he was satisfied, for he took his sweat-stained horse back into the brush and tied it to a cottonwood. He retraced his own steps and selected carefully a place among the thick bushes by the roadside. With his pocket-knife he cut eyeholes in the bandanna handkerchief that had been around his neck, and tied it over his face in such a way as to conceal his features entirely. Then he carefully emptied from the rifle he had taken from its case beside the saddle all the cartridges it contained and dropped them into his pocket.

These preparations made, he sat down and waited. There came to him very soon the rumble of wheels. Presently a one-horse trap appeared at a curve of the road. Captain Kilmeny was the driver.

Jack rose noiselessly and thrust the barrel of his rifle through the bushes. He was

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within six feet of the road and he waited until his cousin was almost abreast of him.

"Throw up your hands!"

The captain knew in an instant what he was up against. A masked man with a rifle in his hands could mean only one thing. Ned Kilmeny was no fool. He knew when to fight and when to surrender. His hands went into the air.

"Kick that rifle into the road—with your foot, not with your hands."

The Englishman did as he was told.

"What do you want?" he demanded, looking sharply at the masked bandit.

"I want that satchel beside you. Drop it out."

Again the officer obeyed orders. He asked no questions and made no comment.

"There's room to turn here by backing. Hit the grit for the Lodge."

After he had faced about, Ned Kilmeny had one word to say before leaving.

"I know who you are, and there's just one name for your kind—you're an out-and-out rotter."

"It's a difference of opinion that makes horse-races, Captain," answered the masked man promptly.

NED KILMENY, as he drove back to the Lodge, was sick at heart. He came of a family of clean, honest gentlemen. Most of them had been soldiers. Occasionally one had gone to the devil as this young cousin of his had done. But there was something in this whole affair so contemptible that it hurt his pride. The theft itself was not the worst thing. The miner had traded on their faith in him. He had lied to them, had made a mock of their friendly offers to help him. Even the elements of decency seemed to be lacking in him.

India and Moya were on the veranda when the captain drove up. One glance at his grim face told them something had gone wrong.

"I've been held up," he said simply.

"Held up!"

"Robbed—with a rifle within reach of my hand all the time."

"But—how?" gasped India.

Moya, white to the lips, said nothing. A premonition of the truth clutched icily at her heart.

"A masked man stopped me just as I swung around a bend about three miles from Gunnison. He ordered me to throw out the satchel with the money. I did as I was told."

"He had you covered with a weapon?" asked India.

"With a rifle—yes."

"Did you — recognize him?" Moya's throat was dry, so that her question came almost in a whisper.

The captain's eyes met hers steadily.

"He stayed in the bushes, so that I didn't see his body well. He was masked."

"But you know who it was. Tell me."

Ned Kilmeny was morally certain of the identity of the robber. He could all but swear to the voice, and surely there were not two men in the county with such a free and gallant poise of the head.

"I couldn't take oath to the man."

"It was your cousin."

Moya was pale to the lips. The officer hesitated.

"I'm not prepared to say who the man was."

The pulse in her throat beat fast. Her hand was clutching the arm of a chair so tightly that the knuckles stood out white and bloodless.

"You know better. It was Jack Kilmeny," she charged.

"I could tell you only my opinion," he insisted.

"And I know all about it." Moya came to time with her confession promptly in the fearless fashion characteristic of her. "It was I that sent him to you. It was I that betrayed you to him."

India set her lips to a soundless whistle. Her brother could not keep out of his brown face the amazement he felt.

"I don't wonder you look like that," Moya nodded, gulping down her distress. "You can't think any worse of me than I do of myself."

"Nonsense! If you told him, you had a reason. What was it?" India asked a little sharply.

"No reason that justifies me. He took me by surprise. He had come to get the stolen money and I told him we were returning it to the Fair Association. He guessed the rest. Almost at once he left. I saw him take the cañon cut-off for Gunnison."

"You weren't to blame at all," the captain assured her, adding with a rueful smile: "He didn't take you any more by surprise

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than he did me. I hadn't time to reach for the rifle."

India's Irish eyes glowed with contemptuous indignation. Her anger hit on the same phrase used by her brother.

"He must be an out-and-out rotter. To think he'd rob Ned after what he offered to do for him. I'm through with him."

Her brother said nothing, but in his heart he agreed. There was nothing to be done for a fellow whose sense of decency was as far gone as that.

Moya too kept silence. Her heart was seething with scorn for this handsome scamp who had put this outrage upon them all. It was bad enough to be a thief, but to this he had added deception, falsehood and gross ingratitude. Nor did the girl's contempt spare herself. Neither warning nor advice—and Lady Jim had been prodigal of both—had availed to open her eyes about the Westerner. She had been as foolish over him as a schoolgirl in the matter of a matinée idol. That she would have to lash herself for her folly through many sleepless hours of the night was a certainty.

Meanwhile she went through the part required of her. At dinner she tossed the conversational ball back and forth as deftly as usual, and afterward she played her accustomed game of bridge. Fortunately Kilmeny was her partner. Sometimes when her thoughts wandered the game suffered, but the captain covered her mistakes without comment. She could almost have loved him for the gentle consideration he showed. Why must she needs be so wilful? Why couldn't she have given her heart to this gallant gentleman instead of to the reckless young scoundrel whom she hardly knew?

BEFORE the party broke up a ride was arranged for next morning to the Devil's Slide, a great slab of rock some miles away. The young people were to have an early breakfast and get started before the sun became hot. For this reason the sitting at bridge was short.

But though Moya reached her room before midnight, it was not until day was beginning to break that she fell into a troubled sleep. She tossed through the long hours and lived over every scene that had passed between her and Jack Kilmeny. It was at an end. She would never see him again. She would ride with the others to the Devil's Slide and he would come to the appointment he had made to find her not there. He would go away, and next day she would leave with the rest of her party for the Goldbanks mining country where Verinder and Lord Farquhar were heavily interested in some large gold-producers.

That chapter of her life would be closed. She told herself that it was best so. Her love for a man of this stamp could bring no happiness to her. Moreover, she had taken an irretrievable step in betrothing herself to Captain Kilmeny.

When Fisher awakened her to dress in time for the early breakfast, Moya felt very reluctant to join the others. She would have to laugh and talk and make merry, and all the time she would be miserably unhappy. It would be impossible for her to stand Verinder today without screaming. A sheer physical lassitude weighted her limbs. In the end she went back to bed and sent for India.

"I'm not feeling fit, dear. Let me stay at home with Lady Jim. Would you mind if I beg off?" she asked with a wan smile.

Her friend took in keenly the big, deep-pupiled eyes, ringed with weariness.

"I don't believe you've slept a wink, Moya. Of course you needn't go. Shall I stay with you? I don't really care about going. I'm about fed up with Dobyans Verinder."

But Moya would not hear of this. She protested so much that India saw it would be a greater kindness to leave her alone.

"You must try to sleep again, dear." India moved about, darkening the windows and shaking up the pillows.

"Yes, I will. I'm all right, you know."

Left to herself, Moya tried to sleep. It was no use. She was wide awake beyond hope of another nap. No sooner had the voices of the riders died in the distance than she was dressing feverishly. She told herself that she would go outdoors somewhere with a book and rest. Otherwise Lady Farquhar would be asking questions as to why she had stayed at home.

Fisher brought her some fruit, a cup of coffee and a roll. Moya drank the coffee and ate the fruit, after which she went out into the crisp Colorado sunlight. By her watch it was now nine-fifty.

She made an elaborate pretense with herself of hesitating which way to go. Her thoughts her eyes and at last her footsteps turned toward the grove where yesterday

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Jack Kilmeny had surprised her. But she was too used to being honest with herself to keep up the farce. Stopping on the trail, she brought herself to time.

"You're going to meet that outlaw, Moya Dwight. You said you wouldn't, but you are going. That's why you got out of that ride. No use fibbing to yourself. You've no more will-power than a moth buzzing around a candle-flame."

So she put it to herself, frankly and contemptuously. But no matter how she scorned herself for it there was not in her the strength to turn the back on her temptation. She had always prided herself on knowing her own mind and following it, but the longing in her to hear this man's justification was more potent than pride. Slowly her reluctant steps moved toward the grove.

Long slants of morning sunlight filtered through the leaves of the cottonwoods, so that her figure was flaked with a shifting checker-board of shadow and shine. She sauntered forward, looking neither to the right nor the left, expecting every instant to hear his cheery, impudent greeting.

It did not come. She stole sidelong looks here and there through the dappled woods. They were empty of life save for the chipmunk sitting on its hind legs and watching her light approach. A breeze swept across the river, caught her filmy skirts, and blew them about her ankles. She frowned, brushing down the wind-swept draperies.

Mingled with her disappointment was a sharp sense of shame. He had told her to come here and wait for him, as if she had been a country milkmaid—and here she was meekly waiting. Could degradation take her lower than this, that she should slip out alone to keep an assignation with a thief and a liar who had not taken the trouble to come? At any rate she was spared one humiliation. He would never know she had gone to meet him.

CHAPTER VIII

JACK KILMENY EXPLAINS

INTO the depths of her scorching self-contempt came his blithe "Good morning, neighbor!"

Her heart leaped, but before she looked around Moya made sure no tales could be read in her face. Her eyes met his with quiet scorn.

"I was wondering if you would dare come." The young woman's voice came cool and aloof as the splash of a mountain rivulet.

"Why shouldn't I come, since I wanted to?"

"You can ask me that—now?"

Her manner told him that judgment had been passed, but it did not shake the cheerful good humor of the man.

"I reckon I can."

"Of course you can. I might have known you could. You will probably have the effrontery to deny that you are the man who robbed Captain Kilmeny."

"Did he say I was the man?" There was amusement and a touch of interest in his voice.

"He didn't deny it. I knew it must be you. I told him everything—how you found out from me that he was going to Gunnison with the money and hurried away to rob him of it. Because you are his cousin he wouldn't accuse you. But I did. I do now. You stole the money a second time."

Her words were low, but in them was an extraordinary vehemence, the tenseness of repressed feeling.

"So he wouldn't accuse me, nor yet wouldn't deny that I was the man. Well, I'll not deny it either, since you're so sure."

"You are wise, sir. You can't delude me a second time. Your denial would count for nothing. And now I think there is nothing more to be said."

She had risen and was about to turn away. A gesture of his hand stopped her.

"If you were so sure about me, why didn't you have the officers here to arrest me?"

"Because—because you are a relative of my friends."

"That was the only reason, was it?"

"What other reason could there be?" she asked, a flash of warning in her eyes.

"There might be this reason—that at the bottom of your heart you know I didn't do it."

"Can you tell me you didn't hold up Captain Kilmeny? Dare you tell me that?"

He shrugged his broad shoulders.

"No, I held him up."

"And robbed him."

"If you like to put it that way. I had to do it."

"Had to rob your friend, the man who had offered to stand by you. Oh, I don't want to hear any of your excuses!"

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"Yes, you do," he corrected quietly. "What's more, you are going to hear them, and right now. You're entitled to an explanation, and it's my right to make you listen."

"Can you talk away facts? You robbed your cousin when he was trying to be your friend. That may mean nothing to you. It means a great deal to me!" she cried passionately.

"Sho! An opera-bouffe hold-up. I'll make it right with him when I see Captain Kilmeny."

"You admit you took the money?"

"Sure I took it. Had to have it in my business. If you'll sit down again and listen, neighbor, I'll tell you the whole story."

The amused assurance in his manner stirred resentment.

"No."

"Yes."

THE clash of battle was in the meeting of their eyes. She had courage, just as he had, but she was fighting against her own desire.

"I have listened too often already," she protested.

"It hasn't hurt you any, has it?"

"Lady Farquhar thinks it has." The words slipped out before she could stop them, but as their import came home to her the girl's face flamed. "I mean that—that——"

"I know what you mean," he told her easily, a smile in his shrewd eyes. "You're a young woman—and I'm an ineligible man. So Lady Farquhar thinks we oughtn't to meet. That's all bosh. I'm not intending to make love to you, even though I think you're a mighty nice girl. But say I was. What then? Your friends can't shut you up in a glass cage if you're going to keep on growing. Life was made to be lived."

"Yes—yes—that's what I think!" she cried eagerly. "But it isn't arranged for girls that way—not if they belong to the class I do. We're shut in—chaperoned from everything that's natural. You don't know how I hate it."

"Of course you do. You're a live-wire. That's why you're going to sit down and listen to me."

She looked him straight between the eyes.

"But I don't think morality is only a convention, Mr. Kilmeny. 'Thou shalt not steal,' for instance."

"Depends what you steal. If you take from a man what doesn't belong to him, you're doing the community a service. But we won't go into that now, though I'll just say this: What is right for me wouldn't be for Captain Kilmeny. As I told you before, our standards are different."

"Yes, you explained that to me just after you—while you were hiding from the officers after the first robbery," she assented dryly.

He looked at her and laughed.

"You're prosecuting attorney and judge and jury all in one, aren't you?"

She held her little head uncompromisingly erect. Not again was she going to let her sympathy for him warp her judgment.

"I'm ready to hear what you have to say, Mr. Kilmeny."

"Not guilty, ma'am."

His jaunty *insouciance* struck a spark from her.

"That is what you told us before, and within half an hour we found out that you knew where the booty was hidden. Before that discrepancy was cleared up you convinced us of your innocence by stealing the money a second time."

"What did I do with it?" he asked.

"How should I know?"

From his pocket he drew a note-book. Between two of its leaves was a slip of paper which he handed to Moya. It was a receipt in full from the treasurer of the Gunnison County Fair Association to John Kilmeny for the sum previously taken from him by parties unknown.

The girl looked at him with shining eyes.

"You repented and took the money back?"

"No. I didn't repent, but I took it back."

"Why?"

"That's a long tale. It's tied up with the story of my life—goes back thirty-one years, before I was born in fact. Want to hear it?"

"Yes."

"My father was a young man when he came to this country. The West wasn't very civilized then. My father was fearless and outspoken, and this made him enemies among the gang of cattle-thieves operating in the country where his ranch lay. He lost calves. One day he caught a brand-blotter at work. The fellow refused to surrender. There was a fight and my father killed him."

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"Oh!" cried the girl softly in fascinated horror.

"Such things had to be in those days. Any man that was a man had sometimes to fight or else go to the wall."

"I can see that. I wasn't blaming your father. Only—it must have been horrible to have to do."

"The fellow thieves of the man swore vengeance. One night they caught the chief—that's what I used to call my father—caught him alone in a gambling-hell in the cow-town where the stockmen came to buy provisions. My father had gone there by appointment to meet a man—lured to his death by a forged note. He knew he had probably come to the end of the passage as soon as he had stepped into the place. His one chance was to turn and run. He wouldn't do that."

"I like him for it!" the girl cried impetuously.

"The story goes that he looked them over contemptuously, the whole half-dozen of them, and laughed in a slow, irritating way that must have got under their hides."

Moya, looking at the son, could believe easily this story of the father.

"Go on," she nodded tensely.

"The quarrel came, as of course it would. Just before the guns flashed a stranger rose from a corner and told the rustlers they would have to count him in the scrap, that he wouldn't stand for a six-to-one row."

"Wasn't that fine? I suppose he was a friend of your father he had helped some time."

"No. He had never seen him before. But he happened to be a man."

THE eyes of the girl were shining. A flame seemed to run over her dusky face, the glow of her generous heart finding expression externally. It was a part of her charm that her delight in life bubbled out in little spasms of laughter, in impetuous movements wholly unpremeditated.

"I'm glad there are such men," she cried softly.

"The story of that fight is a classic today in the hills. When it ended, two of the rustlers were dead, two badly wounded, and the others galloping away for their lives. The chief and his unknown friend were lying on the floor shot to pieces."

"But they lived—surely they didn't die?"

"Yes, they lived and became close friends. A few years later they were partners. Both of them are dead now. Sam Lundy—that was the name of my father's rescuer—left two children, a boy and a girl. We call the boy Red Haid. He was down at the camp fishing with me."

She saw the truth then, knew in a flash that the man beside her had run the risk of prison to save his friend. And her heart went out to him in such a rush of feeling that she had to turn her face away.

"You paid back the debt to the son that your father owed his. Oh, I'm glad—so glad!"

"Guessed it, have you?"

"Your friend was the thief."

"He took the money, but he's no thief—not in his heart. In England only a criminal would do such a thing, but it's different here. A hold-up may be a decent fellow gone wrong through drink and bad company. That's how it was this time. My friend is a range-rider. His heart is as open and clean as the plains. But he's young yet, just turned twenty, and he's easily led. This thing was sprung on him by an older man with whom he had been drinking. Before they were sober he and Mosby had taken the money."

"I am sorry," the girl said almost under her breath.

There was still some hint of the child in the naive nobility of her youth. Joyce Seldon would have had no doubts about what to think of this alien society where an honest man could be a thief and his friend stand ready to excuse him. Moya found it fresh and stimulating.

He explained more fully.

"Colter by chance got a line on what the kid and Mosby were planning to pull off. Knowing I had some influence with Lundy, he came straight to me. That was just after I had ridden at the finals in the contest."

"I remember seeing him with you. We all thought you should have come up for a few words with us."

"I intended to, but there wasn't any time. We hurried out to find Lundy. Well, we were too late. Our horses were gone by the time we had reached the corral where we were stabling, but those of the other boys were waiting in the stalls already saddled.

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We guessed the hold-up would be close to the bank, because the treasurer of the association might take any one of three streets to drive in from the fair-grounds. That's where we went wrong. The boys were just drunk enough not to remember this. Well, while we were looking for our friends to stop this crazy play they were going to pull off, Colter and I met the president of the bank. We had known him in the mining country and he held us there talking. While we were still there news comes of the robbery."

"And then?"

"We struck straight back to the corral. Our horses were there. The boys had ridden back, swapped them for their own, and hit the trail. Mosby's idea had been to throw suspicion on us for an hour or two until they could make their getaway. We rode back to the crowd, learned the particulars, and followed the boys. My thought was that if we could get the money from them we might make terms with the association."

"That's why you were in a hurry when you passed us."

"That's why."

"And of course the sheriff thought you you were running away from him."

"He couldn't think anything else, could he?"

"How blind I was, how lacking in faith! And all the time I knew in my heart you couldn't have done it," she reproached herself.

His masterful eyes fastened on her.

"Did your friends know it? Did Miss Joyce think I couldn't have done it?"

"You'll have to ask her what she thought. I didn't hear Joyce give an opinion."

"Is she going to marry that fellow Verinder?"

"I don't know."

"He'll ask her, won't he?"

She smiled at his blunt question a little wanly.

"You'll have to ask Mr. Verinder that. I'm not in his confidence."

"You're quibbling. You know well enough."

"I think he will."

"Will she take him?"

"It's hard to tell what Joyce will do. I'd rather not discuss the subject, please. Tell me, did you find your friends?"

"We ran them down in the hills at last. I knew pretty well about where they would be, and one morning I dropped in on them. We talked it all over and I put it up to them that if they would turn the loot over to me I'd try to call off the officers. Red Haid was sick and ashamed of the whole business and was willing to do whatever I thought best.

"Mosby had different notions, but I persuaded him to see the light. They told me where they had hidden the money in the river. I was on my way back to get it when I found little Bess Landor lost in the hills. Gill nabbed me as I took her to the ranch."

"And after you were taken back to Gunnison—did you break prison?"

"I proved an alibi — one the sheriff couldn't get away from. We had gilt-edged proof we weren't near the scene of the robbery. The president of the bank, as I have told you, had been talking to us about ten minutes when the treasurer of the association drove up at a gallop to say he had just been robbed."

"So they freed you."

"I made a proposition to the district attorney and the directors of the association that if I got the money back all prosecutions would be dropped. They agreed. I came back for the money and found it gone."

"If you had only told me that then."

"I had no time. My first thought was to tell my cousin the truth, but I was afraid to take a chance on him. The only way to save Lundy was to take back the money myself. I couldn't be sure that Captain Kilmeny would believe my story. So I played it safe and helped myself."

"You must think a lot of your friend to go so far for him."

"His mother turned him over to me to make a man of him, and if she hadn't I owed it to his father's son."

Her eyes poured upon him their warm approving light.

"Yes, you would have to help him no matter what it cost."

"It wasn't costing me a cent," he protested against heroics with a face crinkled to humor.

"It might have cost you a great deal. Suppose that Captain Kilmeny had picked up his gun. You couldn't have shot him."

"I'd have told him who I was and why I must have the money. No, Miss Dwight, I don't fit the specifications of a hero."

Moya's lips curved to the sweet little derisive twist that was a smile in embryo.

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"I know about you, sir."

Kilmeny took his eyes from her to let them rest upon a man and a woman walking the river-trail below. The man bowed and the Westerner answered the greeting by lifting his hat. When he looked back at his companion, he was smiling impishly. For the two by the river bank were Lord and Lady Farquhar.

"Now you're going to catch it for being a naughty little girl and going off to play with the bad boy you've been told to keep away from."

"Yes," she agreed, dimpling.

"Shall we go and 'fess up?"

"I think I'd better," the girl nodded.

They moved forward to meet her chaperon.

OVER the brow of a hillock appeared Lord and Lady Farquhar walking toward them. One glance told Moya that her chaperon had made up her mind to drive Jack Kilmeny from the field.

Lady Jim looked at her husband. He cleared his throat in some embarrassment.

"Mornin', Mr. Kilmeny. If you have time, I'd like to have you look over some ore samples sent from our mine."

The American smiled. He understood perfectly.

"I've got all the time there is."

"First let me tell you the news," Moya intervened. "Mr. Kilmeny has been freed of all suspicion in connection with the robbery. The money has been returned and the whole thing dropped."

"Glad to hear it!" Farquhar's face cleared. He emphasized his words by adding a moment later: "By Jove, I *am* glad! Congratulations, Mr. Kilmeny."

His wife added hers, but there was a note of reserve in her manner. Plainly she was not fully satisfied.

Eagerly Moya turned to the young man.

"May I tell all about it?"

He hesitated, then nodded shortly—

"If you like."

Her voice vibrant with sympathy, Moya told the story in her ardent way. Kilmeny said nothing, but the corners of his mouth suggested amusement. Something of humorous derision in his blue eyes told Farquhar that the Coloradoan did not take the girl's admiration as his due. Rather he seemed to regard it merely as an evidence of her young enthusiasm.

Lord Farquhar shook hands frankly with Kilmeny.

"We've done you an injustice. If I had a son, I would want him to have played the part you did under the same circumstances."

His wife backed him up loyally, but with misgivings. The character of this young man might be cleared, but that did not make him any more eligible. Her smile had in it some suggestion of the reserve of the chaperon.

"I'm glad to know the truth, Mr. Kilmeny. It does you credit. Your cousins won't be back to lunch, but if you can stay——"

"I can't, Lady Farquhar. Thanks just the same. I've got to ride up into the hills to let the boys know it's all right. We'll be leaving tomorrow to go back to work."

"We go tomorrow, too. I suppose this will be good-by, then." Lady Farquhar offered her hand.

Kilmeny turned last to Moya.

"Good-by, neighbor."

Her eyes did not shrink as the small hand was buried for an instant in his brown palm, but the youth in her face was quenched.

"Good-by," she repeated in a colorless voice.

"Sorry I wasn't able to say good-by to my cousins and Miss Seldon. I understand you're all going up to the mines. Tell Captain Kilmeny I'll try to see him at Goldbanks and make all proper apologies for my bad manners yesterday."

Moya's face lit up.

"Do you live at Goldbanks?"

"Sometimes."

He bowed and turned away.

The girl was left wondering. There had been a note of reservation in his manner when she had spoken of Goldbanks. Was there some mystery about him or his occupation, something he did not want them to know? Her interest was incredibly aroused.

CHAPTER IX

A BLIZZARD

MOYA found in Goldbanks much to interest her. Its helter-skelter streets following the line of least resistance, its slapdash buildings, the scarred hillsides dotted

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with red shaft-houses beneath which straggled slate-colored dumps like long beards, were all indigenous to a life the manner of which she could only guess.

Judged by her Bret Harte, the place ought to be picturesque. Perhaps it was, but Moya was given little chance to find out. At least it was stimulating. Even from an outside point of view she could see that existence was reduced to the elemental. Men fought for gold against danger and privation and toil. No doubt if she could have seen their hearts they fought too for love.

Miss Seldon was frankly bored by the crude rawness of the place. One phase of it alone interested her. Of all this turbid activity Dobyans Verinder was the chief profiter. Other capitalists had an interest in the camp. Lord Farquhar held stock in the Mollie Gibson, and Moya's small inheritance was invested mostly in the mine. The Kilmenys owned shares in two or three paying companies. But Verinder was far and away the largest single owner. His holdings were scattered all over the camp. In the Mollie Gibson and the Never Quit, the two biggest properties at Goldbanks, he held a controlling vote.

It was impossible for Joyce to put her nose out of the hotel without being confronted with the wealth of her suitor. This made a tremendous appeal to the imagination of the young woman. All these thousands of men were toiling to make him richer. If Verinder could have known it, the environment was a potent ally for him. In London he was a social climber in spite of his gold; here he was a sole autocrat of the camp.

As the weeks passed he began to look more possible. His wealth would give an amplitude, a spaciousness, that would make the relationship tolerable. As a man of moderate means he would not have done at all, but every added million would help to reduce the intimacy of the marital tie. To a certain extent she would go her way and he his. Meanwhile she kept him guessing. Sometimes her smiles brought him on the run. Again he was made to understand that it would be better to keep his distance.

The days grew shorter and the mornings colder. As the weeks passed the approach of Winter began to push Autumn back. Once or twice there was an inch of snow in the night that melted within a few hours. The Farquhar party began to talk of getting back to London, but there was an impending consolidation of properties that held the men at Goldbanks. For a month it had been understood that they would be leaving in a few days now, but the deal on hand was of such importance that it was felt best to stay until it was effected.

One afternoon Moya and Joyce rode out from the cañon where the ugly little town lay huddled and followed the road down into the foothills. It was a day of sunshine, but back of the mountains hung a cloud that had been pushing slowly forward. In it the peaks were already lost. The great hills looked as if the knife of a Titan had sheared off their summits.

The young women came to a bit of level and cantered across the mesa in a race. They had left the road to find wild flowers for Lady Jim.

Joyce, in a flush of physical well-being, drew up from the gallop and called back in gay derision to her friend.

"Oh, you slow-pokes! We win. Don't we, Two Step?" And she patted the neck of her pony with a little gloved hand.

Moya halted beside the dainty beauty and laughed slowly, showing in two even rows the tips of small, strong teeth.

"Of course you win. You're always off with a hurrah before one knows what's on. Nobody else has a chance." Moya glanced at the darkening horizon. "We'd better hurry. It's going to storm."

THEY wandered among the hills searching for the gorgeous blossoms of Fall. Not for half an hour did they remount.

"Which way for home?" Joyce asked briskly, smoothing her skirt.

Her friend looked around before she answered.

"I don't know. Must be over that way, don't you think?"

Joyce answered with a laugh, using a bit of American slang she had heard the day before.

"Search me! Wouldn't it be jolly if we were lost?"

"How dark the sky is getting! I believe a flake of snow fell on my hand."

"Yes. There's one on my face. The road must be just around this hill."

"I dare say you're right. These hills are like peas in a pod. I can't tell one from another."

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They rode around the base of the hill, into a little valley formed by other hills. No sign of the road appeared.

"We're lost, Moya. They'll have to send out search parties for us. We'll get in the dreadful Sunday papers again."

Joyce laughed, but an anxious little frown showed on Moya's forehead. She was not frightened, but she was beginning to get worried. A rising wind and a falling temperature were not good omens. Moreover, one of those swift changes common to the Rockies had come over the country. Out of a leaden sky snow was falling fast. Banked clouds were driving the wintry sunshine toward the horizon. It would soon be night, and if the signs were true a bitter one of storm.

"It's getting cold. We must find the road and hurry home," Joyce said.

"Yes."

Moya's voice was cheerful, but her heart had sunk. An icy hand seemed to have clutched it and tightened. She had heard the dreadful things that happened during Rocky Mountain blizzards. They must find the road. They *must* find it.

She set herself searching for it, conscious all the time that they might be going in the wrong direction. For this unfeatured roll of hills offered no guide, no landmark that stood out from the surrounding country.

Moya covered her anxiety with laughter and small jokes, but there came a time when these did not avail, when Joyce faced the truth, too, that they were lost, two helpless girls, with night upon them and a storm driving up. Somewhere not many miles from them lay Goldbanks. There were safety, snug electric-lighted rooms with great fires blazing from open chimneys, a thousand men who would gladly have gone into the night to look for them. But all of these might as well be a hundred leagues away.

The big, deep eyes of Joyce shone with fear. Never before in her protected life had she been brought close to Nature in one of her terrible moods.

From her soft, round throat sobbing words leaped.

"We're lost, Moya! We're going to die."

"Nonsense. Don't be a goosie," her downright friend answered sharply.

"But what shall we do?"

Scudding clouds had leaped across the sky and wiped out the last narrow line of sunlight along the eastern horizon. Every minute it was getting colder. The wind had a bitter sting to it.

"We must find the trail," Moya replied.

"And if we don't?"

"But we shall," the Irish girl assured with a finality that lacked conviction. "You wait here. Don't move from the spot. I'm going to ride around you at a little distance. There must be a trail here—somewhere."

MOYA gave her pony the quirt and cantered off. Swiftly she circled, but before she had completed the circumference the snow, now falling heavily, had covered the ground and obliterated any path there might be. With a heavy heart she started to return to her friend.

Owing both to the lay of the ground and the increasing density she could not see Joyce. Thrice she called before a faint answer reached her ears. Moya rode toward the voice, stopping now and again to call and wait for a reply. Her horizon was now just beyond the nose of her pony, so that it was not until they were only a few yards apart that she saw Two Step and its rider. Both broncho and girl were sheeted with snow.

"Oh, I thought you were gone. I thought you were never coming," Joyce reproached in a wail of despair. "Did you find the road?"

"No, but I've thought of something. They say horses will find their own way home if you let them. Loosen the reins, dear."

Moya spoke with a businesslike cheerfulness meant to deceive her friend. She knew it must be her part to lead. Joyce was as soft and about as competent as a kitten to face a crisis like this. She was a creature all curves and dimples, sparkling with the sunshine of life like the wavelets of a glassy sea. But there was in her an instinctive shrinking from all pain and harshness. When her little world refused to smile, as very rarely it did for her, she shut her eyes, stopped her ears and pouted. Against the implacable condition that confronted them now she could only whimper her despair.

They waited with loose reins for the ponies to move. The storm beat upon them, boxing their vision to a space within reach of their outstretched arms. Only the frightened wails of Joyce and the comforting words of her friend could be heard in

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the shriek of the wind. The ponies, feeling themselves free, stirred restlessly. Moya clucked to her roan and patted his neck encouragingly.

"Good old Billy. Take us home, old fellow," she urged.

Presently the horse began to move, aimlessly at first, but soon with a steadiness that suggested purpose. Moya unloosed with her chill fingers the rope coiled to her saddle, and threw one end to her friend.

"Tie it tight to the saddle-horn, Joyce, with a double knot," she ordered. "And keep your hand on it to see that it doesn't come undone."

"I can't tie it. My hands are frozen—I'm freezing to death!"

Moya made fast one end of the rope and then slipped from the saddle. The other end she tied securely to the saddle-horn of her friend. She stripped from her hands the heavy riding-gauntlets she wore and gave them to Joyce.

"Pull these on and your hands will be warmer. Don't give up. Sit tight and buck up! If you do we'll be all right."

"But I can't. . . . It's awful. . . . How far do we have to go?"

"We'll soon hit the road. Then we can go faster."

Moya swung to her saddle again stiffly, and Billy took up the march in the driving storm which was growing every minute more fierce and bitter. The girl did not dare give way to her own terror, for she felt if she should become panic-stricken all would be lost. She tried to remember how long people could live in a blizzard. Had she not read of some men who had been out two days in one and yet reached safety?

The icy blast bit into her, searched through to her bones and sapped her strength. More than once she drew up the rope with her icy hands to make sure that Joyce was still in the saddle. She found her there blue from exposure, almost helpless, but still faintly responsive to the call of life.

The horses moved faster, with more certainty, so that Moya felt they had struck a familiar trail. But in her heart she doubted whether either of the riders would come to shelter alive. The ponies traveled upward into the hills.

Joyce, lying forward helpless across the saddle-horn, slid gently to the ground. Her friend stopped. What could she do? Once she had descended, it would be impossible to get back into the saddle.

SEARCHING the hillside, the girl's glance was arrested by a light. She could not at first believe her good fortune. From the saddle she slipped to the ground in a huddle, stiffly found her feet again and began to clamber up the stiff incline. Presently she made out a hut. Now on her feet, now on all fours, she staggered up till she reached the door and fell heavily against it, clutching at the latch so that it gave to her hand and sent her lurching into the room. Her knees doubled under her and she sank at the feet of one of two men who sat beside a table playing cards.

The man leaped up as if he had seen a ghost.

"Goddlemighty, it's a woman!"

"My friend. . . . She's outside. . . . At the foot of the hill. . . . Save her!" the girl's white lips framed.

They slipped on mackinaw coats and disappeared into the white, swirling night. Moya crouched beside the red-hot stove, and life slowly tingled through her frozen veins, filling her with sharp pain. To keep back the groans she had to set her teeth. It seemed to her that she had never endured such agony.

After a time the men returned, carrying Joyce between them. They put her on the bed at the far corner of the room, and one of the men poured from a bottle on the table some whisky. This they forced between her unconscious lips. With a shivering sigh she came back to her surroundings.

Moya moved across to the group by the bed.

"I'll take care of her if you'll look after the horses," she told the men.

"The horses will have to rough it," one of them answered roughly. "This ain't any night for humans to be hunting horses."

"They can't be far," Moya pleaded.

Grudgingly the second man spoke.

"Guess we better get them, Dave. They were down where we found the girl. We can stable them in the tunnel."

Left to herself, Moya unlaced the shoes of Miss Seldon. Vigorously she rubbed the feet and limbs till the circulation began to be restored. Joyce cried and writhed with the pain, while the other young woman massaged and cuddled her in turn. The worst of the suffering was past before the

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men returned, stamping snow from their feet and shaking it from their garments over the floor.

"A rotten night to be out in," the one called Dave growled to his fellow.

"Did you get the horses?" Moya asked timidly.

"They be in the tunnel." The ungracious answer was given without a glance in her direction.

THEY were a black-avised, ill-favored pair, these miners upon whose hospitality Fate had thrown them. Foreigners of some sort they were, Cornishmen Moya guessed. But whatever their nationality they were primeval savages untouched by the fourteen centuries of civilizing influences since their forebears ravaged England. To the nervous minds of these exhausted young women there was a suggestion of apes in the huge muscle-bound shoulders and the great torn hands at the ends of long, gnarled arms. Small, shifty black eyes, rimmed with red from drink, suggested cunning, while the loose-lipped, heavy mouths added more than a hint of bestiality. It lent no comfort to the study of them that the large whisky-bottle was two-thirds empty.

They slouched back to their cards and their bottle. It had been bad enough to find them sullen and inhospitable, but as the liquor stimulated their unhealthy imaginations it was worse to feel the covert looks stealing now and again toward them. Joyce, sleeping fitfully in the arms of Moya, woke with a start to see them drinking together at the table.

"I don't like them. I'm afraid of them," she whispered.

"We mustn't let them know it," Moya whispered in her ear.

For an hour she had been racked by fears, had faced unflinchingly their low laughs and furtive glances.

Now one of the men asked—

"From Goldbanks?"

"Yes."

"You don't live there."

"No. We belong to the English party—Mr. Verinder's friends."

"Oh, Verinder's friends. And which of you is his particular friend?" The sneer was unmistakable.

"We started out this afternoon for wild flowers and the storm caught us," Moya hurried on.

"So you're Verinder's friends, eh? Well, we don't think a whole lot of Mr. Verinder out here."

Moya knew now that the mention of Verinder's name had been a mistake. The relations between the mine-owners and the workmen in the camp were strained, and as a foreign non-resident capitalist the English millionaire was especially obnoxious. Moreover, his supercilious manners had not helped to endear him since his arrival.

The man called Dave got to his feet with a reckless laugh.

"No free lodgings here for Mr. Verinder's friends. You'n got to pay for your keep, my dears."

Miss Dwight looked at him with unflinching eyes which refused to understand his meaning.

"We'll pay whatever you ask and double the amount after we reach camp."

"Don't want your dirty money. Gi' us a kiss, lass. That's fair pay. We ain't above kissing Verinder's friends, if he is a rotten slave-driver."

Moya rose to her slender height, and the flash of courage blazed in her eyes.

"Sit down," she ordered.

The man stopped in his tracks, amazed at the resolution of the slim, tall girl.

"Go on, Dave. Don't let her bluff you," his companion urged.

The miner laughed and moved forward.

"You coward, to take advantage of two girls driven to you by the storm. I didn't think the man lived that would do it," panted Moya.

"You'n got a bit to learn, miss. Whad's the use of gettin' your Dutch up? I ain't good enough for 'ee, like enough."

The girl held up a hand.

"Listen!"

They could hear only the wild roar of the storm outside and the low sobs of Joyce as she lay crouched on the bed.

"Well?" he growled. "I'm listenin'. What then?"

"I'd rather go out into that white death than stay here with such creatures as you are."

"Doan't be a fool, lass. Us'n won't hurt 'ee any," the second man reassured roughly.

"You'll stay here where it's warm. But you'll remember that we're boss in this

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shack. You'n came without being asked. I'm domned if you'll ride your high horse over me!"

"Go on, Dave. Take your kiss, man."

Then the miracle happened. The door opened, and out of the swirling, wind-tossed snow came a man.

CHAPTER X

OUT OF THE STORM A MAN

HE STOOD blinking in the doorway, white-sheeted with snow from head to heel. As his eyes became accustomed to the light, they passed with surprise from the men to the young women. A flash of recognition lit in them, but he offered no word of greeting.

Plainly he had interrupted a scene of some sort. The leer on the flushed face of Dave, the look of undaunted spirit in that of the girl facing him, the sheer panic-stricken terror of her crouching companion, all told him as much. Nor was it hard to guess the meaning of that dramatic moment he had by chance chosen for his entrance. His alert eyes took in every detail, asked questions but answered none, and in the end ignored much.

"What are you doing here?" demanded one of the miners.

"Been out to the Jack Pot and was on my way back to town. Got caught in the storm and struck for the nearest shelter. A bad night out, Trefoyle." He closed the door, moved forward into the room, and threw off his heavy overcoat.

Moya had recognized him from the first instant. Now Joyce, too, saw who he was. She twisted lithely from the bed, slipped past Moya, past the miners, and with the sob of a frightened child caught at his hand and arm.

"Oh, Mr. Kilmeny, save us—save us!"

"It's all right," Jack nodded reassuringly. "Don't worry!"

She clung to him, shivering back to self-control. This man's presence spelled safety. In the high-laced boots of a mining man, he showed a figure well-knit and graceful, springy with youth but carrying the poise of power. His clean-cut, bronzed face backed the promise; so, too, did the ease of his bearing.

Moya gave a deep sigh of relief and sat down on the edge of the bed, grown suddenly faint. At last her burden was lifted to stronger shoulders.

"You ain't wanted here, Jack Kilmeny," the standing miner said sourly. He was undecided what to do, perplexed and angry at this unexpected hindrance.

"Seems to be a difference of opinion about that, Peale," retorted the newcomer lightly, kicking snow from the spurs and the heels of his boots.

"Trefoyle and me own this cabin. You'll sing small, by Goad, or you'll get out."

"You wouldn't put a dog out on a night like this, let alone a man. It would be murder," Kilmeny answered mildly, warming his hands at the stove.

"There's horses in the tunnel. You can bed wi' them."

Jack glanced around, took in the whisky-bottle and their red-rimmed eyes. He nodded agreement.

"Right you are, boys. We three will move over to the tunnel and leave the house to the women."

"You ain't got the say here, not by a domned sight, Jack Kilmeny. This'll be the way of it. You'll git out. We'll stay. Understand?" Peale ground out between set teeth.

Jack smiled, but his eyes were like steel.

"Suppose we go over to the shaft-house and talk it over, boys. We'll all understand it better then."

Kilmeny still stood close to the red-hot stove. He was opening and closing his fingers to take the stiffness of the frost out of them.

"By Goad, no! You go, we stay. See?"

The young man was now rubbing industriously the thumb and forefinger of his right hand with the palm of his left.

"No, I don't see that, Peale. Doesn't sound reasonable to me. But I'll talk it over with you both in the shaft-house."

Jack's eyes were fastened steadily on Peale. The man was standing close to a shelf in a corner of the cabin. The shelf was in the shadow, but Kilmeny guessed what lay upon it. He was glad that though his legs were still stiff and cold the fingers of his right hand had been massaged to a supple warmth.

"You be warm now, lad. Clear out," warned the big Cornishman.

"Build 'ee a fire in the tunnel, mon," suggested Trefoyle.

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"We'll all go or we'll all stay. Drop that, Peale."

The last words rang out in sharp command. Quicker than the eye could follow Kilmeny's hand had brushed up past his hip and brought with it a shining .38.

Taken by surprise, Peale stood stupidly, his hand still on the shelf. His fingers had closed on a revolver, but they had found the barrel instead of the butt.

"Step forward to the table, Peale, with your hand empty. That's right. Now listen. These young women have got to sleep. They're fagged to exhaustion. We three are going over to the shaft-house. Anything you've got to say to me can be said there. Understand?"

The man stood in a stubborn, sullen silence, but his partner spoke up.

"No guns along, Kilmeny, eh?"

"No. We'll leave them here."

"Good enough, eh Peale?"

Trefoyle's small eyes glittered. Slyly he winked to his partner to agree, then got a lantern, lit it clumsily, and shuffled out with Peale at his heels.

Joyce clung to Jack's arm, bewitchingly helpless and dependent. A queer thrill went through him at the touch of her soft finger-tips.

"You won't leave us," she implored. "You wouldn't, would you?"

"Only for a little while. Bolt the door. Don't open it unless I give the word."

He stepped across to Moya and handed her his revolver. In a very low voice he spoke to her.

"Remember. You're not to open unless I tell you to let me in. If they try to break the door, shoot through it at them waist-high. *Shoot to kill!* Promise me that."

Her dark eyes met and searched his. The faintest quiver of the lip showed that she knew what was before him.

"I promise," she said in the same low voice.

Moya bolted the door after him and sat down trembling by the table, the revolver in her shaking hand. She knew he had gone to fight for them and that he had left his weapon behind according to agreement. He was going against odds just as his father had done before him in that memorable fight years ago. If they beat him, they would probably kill him. And what chance had one slender man against two such giants? She shuddered.

"What are they going to do, Moya?" whispered Joyce.

Her friend looked at her steadily.

"Didn't you hear? They said they wanted to talk over the arrangements."

"Yes, but—didn't it seem to you—why did he give you that pistol?"

"Oh, just so that we wouldn't be afraid."

Hand in hand they sat. Their hearts beat like those of frightened rabbits. The wail of the wind screaming outside seemed the cry of lost souls. Was murder being done out there while they waited?

KILMENY strode after the Cornishmen with the light-footed step of a night-nurse. Beside the huge miners he looked slight, but the flow of his rippling muscles was smooth and hard as steel. He had been in many a rough-and-tumble fray. The saying went in Goldbanks that he "had the guts" and could whip his weight in wildcats. There was in him the fighting edge, that stark courage which shakes the nerve of a man of lesser mettle. He knew that tonight he needed it if ever he did. For these men were strong as bears and had as little remorse.

Inside the shaft-house his quick glance swept the dimly lighted room and took in every detail.

Trefoyle put the lantern down on a shelf and turned to the man who had interfered with them.

"Is't a fight ye want, mon?"

Kilmeny knew the folly of attempting argument or appeal to their sense of right. Straight to business he cut.

"I'm not hunting one. But I reckon this is up to me. I'll take you one at a time—unless you'd rather try it two to one and make sure."

His sneer stung. Peale tore off his coat with an angry roar.

"By Goad, I'm good enough for you!"

Head down like a bull, he rushed at his foe. Jack side-stepped and lashed out at him as he shot past. Peale went down heavily but scrambled awkwardly to his feet and flung himself forward again. This time Kilmeny met him fairly with a straight left, tilted back the shaggy head, and crossed with the right to the point of the jaw.

As the fellow went to the floor the second time Jack was struck heavily on the side of his face and knocked from his feet upon the body of the Cornishman. Even as he fell

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Kilmeny knew that Trefoyle had broken faith. He rolled over quickly so that the latter, throwing himself heavily on top of him, kneed his partner instead of Jack.

His great hands gripped the young man as he wriggled away. By sheer strength they dragged him back. Kilmeny wrapped his legs around Trefoyle. He heard a groan and guessed the reason. The muscular legs clenched tighter and moved slowly up and down those of his foe.

With a cry of pain the Cornishman flung himself to one side and tore loose. His trousers-legs were ripped from thigh to calf and blood streamed down the limb. The sharp rowels of Kilmeny's spurs had sunk into the flesh and saved their owner.

JACK staggered to his feet half dazed. Peale was slowly rising, his murderous eyes fixed on the young man. The instinct of self-preservation sent the latter across the room to a pile of steel drills. As the two men followed he stooped, caught up one of the heavy bars, and thrust with a short-arm movement for Trefoyle's head. The man threw out his hands and keeled over like a stuck pig.

Kilmeny threw away his drill and fought it out with Peale. They might have been compared to a rapier and a two-handed broadsword. Jack was more than a skilled boxer. He was a cool, punishing fighter, one who could give as well as take. Once Peale cornered him, bent evidently on closing and crushing his ribs with a terrific bear-hug. It would have been worth a dozen lessons from a boxing-master to see how the young man fought him back with jabs and uppercuts long enough to duck under the giant's arm to safety.

The wild, swinging blows of the Cornishman landed heavily from time to time, but his opponent's elbow or forearm often broke the force. The lighter man was slippery as an eel, as hard to hit as a Corbett. Meanwhile he was cutting his foe to ribbons, slashing at him with swift drives that carried the full force of one hundred seventy-five pounds, sending home damaging blows to the body that played the mischief with his wind. The big miner's face was a projection map with wheals for mountains and with rivers represented by red trickles of blood.

Quartering around the room they came again to the drills. Peale, panting and desperate, stooped for one of them. As he rose unsteadily Kilmeny closed, threw him hard, and fell on top. Jack beat savagely the swollen upturned face with short-arm jolts until the fellow relaxed his hold with a moan.

"Doan't 'ee kill me, mon. I've had enough," he grunted.

Kilmeny sprang to his feet, caught up the bar of steel, and poked the prostrate man in the ribs with it.

"Get up!" he ordered. "You're a pair of cowardly brutes. Can't be decent to a couple of helpless women in your power. Can't play fair in a fight with a man half the size of one of you. Get up, I say, and throw a dipperful of water in Trefoyle's face. He's not dead by a long shot, though he deserves to be."

Peale clambered to his feet in sulky submission and did as he was told. Slowly Trefoyle's eyelids flickered open.

"What be wrong wi' un?" he asked, trying to sit up.

"You got what was coming to you. Is it enough, or do you want more?"

"Did 'ee hit me, lad? Fegs, it's enough. I give you best."

"Then get up. We'll go back to the house for blankets and fuel. You'll sleep tonight with the horses in the tunnel."

The two girls shivering in the hot room heard the footsteps of the returning men as they crunched the snow. Moya sat opposite the door, white to the lips, her hand resting on the table and holding the revolver. Joyce had sunk down on the bed and had covered her face with her hands.

A cheerful voice called to them from outside.

"All right. Everything settled. Let us in, please."

Moya flew to the door and unbolted it. The Cornishmen came in first, and after them Kilmeny. At sight of the ravages of war Joyce gave a cry of amazement. The big miners were covered with blood. They had the cowed hangdog look of thoroughly beaten men. Jack's face, too, was a sight but he still walked springily.

He gave curt commands and the others obeyed him without a word. Almost the first thing he did was to step to the table and fling the whisky-bottle through the open door into the swirling snow driven by the storm.

"We'll not need that," he said.

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ONE of the miners gathered up their extra blankets while the other took a load of firewood.

As soon as they had gone Joyce cried breathlessly—

"You fought them?"

Jack looked at her and his eyes softened. All men answered to the appeal of her beauty.

"We had a little argument. They couldn't see it my way. But they're satisfied now."

Moya bit her lower lip. She, too, was trembling from the reaction of the fear that had been upon them. Her eyes were shining with tears. A queer emotion welled up in her heart. But it was Joyce who put their thanks into words.

"You saved us! You're the bravest man I ever saw!" she cried.

A deeper color rose to the embarrassed face of the young man.

"I expect you didn't need any saving to speak of. The boys got too ambitious. That's about all." He was thanking his lucky stars that he had come along in the nick of time.

"You can say that, Mr. Kilmeny, but we know," she answered softly.

"All right. Have it your own way, Miss Seldon," he returned with a smile.

"You'll let us doctor your wounds, won't you?" Moya asked shyly.

"You're making me ashamed," he laughed like a boy. "I haven't any wounds. I ought to have washed the blood off before I came in, but I didn't have a chance. All I need is a basin of water and a towel."

The girl ran to get them for him. He protested, laughing, but was none the less pleased while they hovered about him.

"Such a dirty towel. Don't you suppose there's a clean one somewhere?" Joyce said with a little shrug of disgust as she handed it to him.

He shook his head.

"It's like the one in 'The Virginian'—been too popular."

Moya gave him the scarf that had been around her head while she was riding.

"Take this. No—I want you to use it—please."

After he had dried his face Jack explained their disposition for the night.

"We'll stay in the tunnel. You'll be alone here, and quite safe. No need to be in the least nervous. Make yourselves comfortable till morning if you can."

"And you—do you mean that you're going back to those men?" Moya asked.

"They're quite tame, ready to eat out of my hand. Don't worry about me."

"But I don't want you to go. I'm afraid to be alone. Stay here with us, Mr. Kilmeny. I don't care about sleeping," Joyce begged.

"There's nothing to be afraid of, and you need your sleep. I'll not be far away. You couldn't be safer in Goldbanks. I'll be on guard all night, you know," he reassured.

It escaped him for the moment that Joyce was thinking about her own safety while Moya was anxious about his, but later he was to remember it.

He had not been gone ten minutes before Joyce was sound asleep. She trusted him and she trusted Moya, and for her that was enough. All her life she had relied on somebody else to bear the brunt of her troubles. But the girl with the powdered freckles beneath the dusky eyes carried her own burdens. She too had implicit confidence in the champion who had come out of the storm to help them and had taken his life in hand to do it. Her heart went out to him with all the passionate ardor of generous youth. She had never met such a man, so strong, so masterful and yet so boyish.

Her brain was far too active for slumber. She sat before the stove and went over the adventures of the past two hours. How strange that they had met him again in this dramatic fashion. Perhaps he lived at Goldbanks now and they would see more of him. She hoped so mightily, even though there persisted in her mind a picture of his blue-gray eyes paying homage to Joyce.

CHAPTER XI

SHOT TO THE CORE WITH SUNLIGHT

THE storm had blown itself out before morning. A white world sparkled with flashes of sunlight when Moya opened the door of the cabin and gazed out. Looking down into the peaceful valley below, it was hard to believe that death had called to them so loudly only a few hours earlier.

Kilmeny emerged from the shaft-house and cried a cheerful good morning across to her.

"How did you sleep?" he shouted as

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he crunched across the snow toward her.

"Not so very well. Joyce slept for both of us."

Their smiles met. They had been comrades in the determination to shield her from whatever difficulties the situation might hold.

"I'm glad. Is she quite herself this morning? Last night she was very tired and a good deal alarmed."

"Yes. After you came Joyce did not worry any more. She knew you would see that everything was right."

The color crept into his bronzed face.

"Did she say so?"

"Yes. But it was not what she said. I could tell."

"I'm glad I could do what I did."

The eyes that looked at him were luminous. Something sweet and mocking glowed in them inscrutably. He knew her gallant soul approved him, and his heart lifted with gladness. The beauty of her companion fascinated him, but he divined in this Irish girl the fine thread of loyalty that lifted her character out of the commonplace. Her slender, vivid personality breathed a vigor of the spirit wholly engaging.

Joyce joined her friend in the doorway. With her cheeks still flushed from sleep and her hair a little disheveled, she reminded Jack of a beautiful crumpled rose-leaf.

The young woman's smile came out warmly at sight of Kilmeny. Toward this bronzed young fellow she felt very kindly this morning. He had stood between her and trouble. He had fought for her like a man. She did not care if he was a working man. His name was Kilmeny. He was a gentleman by birth, worth a dozen Verinders.

"Mr. Kilmeny, how can we thank you?"

He looked at her and nodded gaily.

"Forget it, Miss Seldon. I couldn't have done less."

"Or more," she added softly.

"The pressing question before the house is breakfast. There is bacon and flour and coffee here. Shall I make a batch of biscuits and offer you pot luck? Or do you prefer to wait till we can get to Goldbanks?"

"What do you think?" Moya asked.

"I think whatever you think. We'll not reach town much before noon. If you can rough it for a meal, I should advise trying out the new cook. It really depends on how hungry you are."

"I'm hungry enough to eat my boots," the Irish girl announced promptly.

"So am I. Let's stay—if our hosts won't object," Joyce added.

"I'm quite sure they won't," Kilmeny replied dryly. "All right. A camp breakfast it is."

"I'm going to help you," Moya told him.

"Of course. You'd better wash the dishes as soon as we get hot water. They're probably pretty grimy."

He stepped into the cabin and took off his coat. Moya rolled up her sleeves to the elbows of her plump, dimpled arms. Miss Seldon hovered about helplessly and wanted to know what she could do.

THE miner had not batched in the hills for years without having learned how to cook. His biscuits came to the table hot and flaky, his bacon was done to a turn. Even the chicory coffee tasted delicious to the hungry guests.

They were still at breakfast when one of the Cornishmen pushed open the door and looked in. He stood looking down on them sullenly without speaking.

"Want to see me, Peale?" asked Kilmeny.

"Did I say I wanted to see 'ee?" demanded the other roughly.

"Better come in and shut the door. The air's chilly."

The battered face of his companion loomed over the shoulder of Peale. To Kilmeny it was plain that they had come with the idea of making themselves disagreeable. Very likely they had agreed to force their company upon the young women for breakfast. But the sight of their dainty grace, together with Jack's cheerful invitation, was too much for their audacity. Peale grumbled something inaudible and turned away, slamming the door as he went.

The young miner laughed softly. If he had shown any unwillingness, they would have pushed their way in. His urbanity had disarmed them.

"They're not really bad men, you know, just think they are," he explained casually.

"I'm afraid of them. I don't trust them," Joyce shuddered.

"Well, I trust them while they're under my eye. The trouble with men of that stripe is that they're yellow. A game man

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gives you a fighting chance, but fellows of this sort hit while you're not looking. But you needn't worry. They're real tame citizens this morning."

"Yes, they looked tame," Moya answered dryly. "So tame I'm sure they'd like to crucify you."

"I dare say they would, but in this world a man can't get everything he would like. I've wanted two or three pleasures myself that I couldn't get."

He rose and left the room. A few minutes later he returned, leading the animals. From the door of the shaft-house the Cornishmen watched them mount and ride away. The men smoked in sullen silence.

Before they had ridden a hundred yards Joyce was in gay talk with Kilmeny. She had forgotten the very existence of the miners. But Moya did not forget. She had seen the expression of their faces as the horses had passed. If a chance ever offered itself, they would have their revenge.

IT WAS a day winnowed from a lifetime of ordinary ones. They rode through a world shot to the core with sunlight. The snow sparkled and gleamed with it. The foliage of the cottonwoods, which already had shaken much of their white coat to the ground, reflected it in greens and golds and russets merged to a note of perfect harmony by the Great Artist. Though the crispness of early Winter was in the air, their nostrils drew in the fragrance of October, the faint wafted perfume of dying Summer.

They reached the road, where two could ride abreast. Sometimes Jack was with the one, again with the other. Moya, who had not much to say this morning, made it easy for him to be with Joyce.

Once he turned to point out to Moya some snow-covered mounds above the road.

"Graves of a dozen mule-skinners killed by Indians nearly thirty years ago. My father was the only one of the party that escaped."

Half a mile from town they met two men on horseback and exchanged news. All Goldbanks had been searching for them through the night. The Farquhar party were wild with anxiety about them.

Kilmeny gave prompt, quiet orders.

"Get back to town, boys, and tell Lady Farquhar that it's all right. We'll be along in a few minutes."

The news of their safety spread as by magic. Men and women and children poured into the streets to welcome them. It was as much as Kilmeny could do to keep back the cheering mob long enough to reach the hotel. Verinder, Lady Jim and India came down the steps to meet them, Captain Kilmeny and Lord Farquhar both being away at the head of search parties. India and Lady Farquhar broke down without shame and cried as they embraced the returned wanderers.

"We thought—we thought——"

India could not finish in words, but Moya knew what she meant.

"It was very nearly that way, dear, but everything is all right now," her friend smiled through a film of tears.

"It was Moya saved us—and afterward Mr. Kilmeny," Joyce explained between sobs.

The crowd below cheered again, and Moya borrowed India's handkerchief to wave. It touched her to see how glad these people were to know they had been rescued.

Lady Farquhar thanked Kilmeny with a gulp in her throat.

"We'll want to hear all about it and to get a chance to thank you properly. Will you come to dinner this evening? Joyce and Moya should be rested by then."

"I'll be very glad to come," Jack accepted promptly.

CHAPTER XII

"PROVE IT . . . PROVE IT"

SAM BLEYER, superintendent of the big Verinder mines, had been up to see his chief at the hotel and was passing the private sitting-room of the Farquhar party when a voice hailed him. He bowed inclusively to Lady Farquhar, Miss Seldon and Miss Dwight.

"You called me?"

"I did. Are you in a very great hurry?"

Joyce flashed her most coquettish smile at him.

"You are never to be in a hurry when Miss Seldon wants you, Bleyer," announced Verinder, following the superintendent into the room.

Bleyer flushed. He was not "a lady's man," as he would have phrased it, but there was an arresting loveliness about Joyce that held the eye.

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"You hear my orders, Miss Seldon," he said.

"Awfully good of you, Mr. Verinder," Joyce acknowledged with a swift slant smile toward the mine-owner. "Just now I want Mr. Bleyer to be an information bureau."

"Anything I can do," murmured Bleyer.

He was a thin little man with a face as wrinkled as a contour map of South America. Thick glasses rested on a Roman nose in front of near-sighted eyes. Frequently he peered over these in an ineffective manner that suggested a lost puppy in search of a friend. But in spite of his appearance Bleyer was a force in Goldbanks. He knew his business and gave his whole energies to it.

"We're all so interested in Mr. Kilmeny. Tell us *all* about him, please."

"That's a rather large order, isn't it?"

The wrinkles in his leathery face broke into a smile.

"What in particular do you want to know?"

"Everything. What does he do? How does he live? How long has he been here?"

"He has been around here about five years. He has a lease in a mine."

There was a flinty dryness in the manner of the superintendent that neither Joyce nor Moya missed.

"And he makes his living by it?"

Above his spectacles the eyes of Bleyer gleamed resentfully.

"You'll have to ask Mr. Kilmeny how he makes his living. I don't know."

"You're keeping something from us. I believe you do know, Mr. Bleyer." With a swift turn Joyce appealed to Verinder. "Make him tell us, please."

Moya did not lift the eyes that were so troubled from the face of Bleyer. She knew the man implied something discreditable to Kilmeny. The look that had flashed between him and Verinder told her so much. Red signals of defiance blazed on both cheeks. Whatever it was, she did not intend to believe him.

Verinder disclosed a proper reluctance.

"Bleyer says he doesn't know."

"Oh, he says! I want him to tell what he thinks."

"You won't like it," the mine-owner warned.

"I'll be the best judge of that." Joyce swung upon Bleyer. "You hear, sir? You're to tell me what you mean."

"I don't mean anything." He paused, then looked straight at Joyce with a visible harshness. "I'll tell you what the common gossip is if you want to know, Miss Seldon. They say he is a highgrader."

"And what is a highgrader?" demanded Moya.

"A highgrader is one who steals rich ore from the mine where he works," answered Verinder smugly.

Moya, eyes hot and shining, flashed her challenge at him.

"I don't believe it—not a word of it, so far as Mr. Kilmeny is concerned!"

"Afraid that doesn't change the fact, Miss Dwight. It's a matter of general knowledge." Beneath Verinder's bland manner there lurked a substratum of triumph.

"General fiddlesticks! Don't believe it, Joyce," cried Moya stormily. "Why he doesn't even work as a miner. He owns his own lease."

"He used to work in the mines even if he doesn't now. There are stories——"

"Ridiculous to think it of Mr. Kilmeny," exploded Moya. "We've done nothing but insult him ever since we've known him. First he was a highwayman. Now he is a thief. Anything else, Mr. Verinder?"

"Everybody knows it," retorted Verinder sulkily.

"Then prove it! Put him in prison. Aren't there any laws in the State? If everybody knows it, why isn't he arrested?" the Irish girl flamed.

"Moya," chided Lady Farquhar gently.

Her ward turned upon Lady Jim a flushed face stirred by anger to a vivid charm.

"Can't you see how absurd it is? He owns his own lease. Mr. Bleyer admits it. Is he robbing himself then?"

THE muscles stood out on the cheeks of the superintendent like cords. He stuck doggedly to his guns.

"I didn't say he stole the ore himself. The charge is that he buys it from the men who do take it. His lease is an excuse. Of course he pretends to get the ore there."

"It's the common talk of the camp," snapped Verinder contemptuously. "The man doesn't even keep it under decent cover."

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"Then prove it . . . prove it! That ought to be easy since everybody knows it." Moya's voice was low, but her scornful passion lashed the Englishman as with a whip.

"By Jove, that's just what I'm going to do. I'm going to put our friend behind the bars for a few years," the little man cried triumphantly.

The red spots on Moya's cheeks burned. The flashing eyes of the girl defied him.

"If you can," she amended with quiet anger.

"Dear me, aren't we getting a little excited?" The soft laugh of Joyce saved for the moment the situation. "Mr. Bleyer, tell me more. How does a—a highgrader didn't you call him?—how does he get a chance to steal the ore?"

"He picks out the best pieces while he is working, the nuggets that are going to run a high per cent. of gold, and pockets them. At night he carries them away."

"But haven't you any policemen here? Why don't you stop them and search them?"

"The miners' union is too strong. There would be a strike if we tried it. But it has got to come to that soon. The companies will have to join hands for a finish fight. They can't have men hoisted up from their work with a hundred dollars' worth of ore stowed away on them."

"Is it as bad as that, Mr. Bleyer?" asked Lady Farquhar in surprise.

"Sometimes they take two or three hundred dollars' worth at once."

"They don't all steal, do they?" demanded Moya with an edge of sarcasm in her clear voice.

Bleyer laughed grimly.

"I'd like to know the names of even a few that don't. I haven't been introduced to them."

"One hundred per cent. dishonest," murmured Moya without conviction.

"I don't guarantee the figures, Miss Dwight," the superintendent added grudgingly. "They don't look at it that way. Bits of high-grade ore are their perquisite, they pretend to think."

Verinder broke in:

"They say your friend Kilmeny took ore to the value of two thousand dollars from the Never Sweat on one occasion. It ran to that amount by actual smelter test, the story goes. I've always rather doubted it."

"Why—since he is so dishonest?" Moya flung at him.

"Don't think a man could carry away so much at one time. What d'ye think, Bleyer?"

"Depends on how high grade ore the mine carries. At Cripple Creek we found nearly four thousand on a man once. He was loaded down like a freight car, looked like the fat boy in 'Pickwick Papers'."

"Should think he'd bulge out with angles where the rock projected," Lady Farquhar suggested.

"The men have it down to a system there. We used to search them as they left work. They carry the ore in all sorts of unexpected places, such as the shoulder padding of their coats, their mouths, their ears, and in slings scattered over the body. The ore is pounded so that it does not bulge."

"Perhaps I'm doing Mr. Kilmeny an injustice then. Very likely he did get away with two thousand at one time," Verinder jeered with an unpleasant laugh.

"Yes, let's think the worst of everybody that we can, Mr. Verinder," came Moya's quick, scornful retort.

The Crœsus of Goldbanks stood warming himself with his back to the grate, as smug and dapper a little man as could be found within a day's journey.

"Very good, Miss Dwight. Have it your own way. I'm not a bally prophet, you know, but I'll go this far. Your little tin hero is riding for a fall. It's all very well for him to do the romantic and that sort of piffle, by Jove, but when you scrape the paint off he's just a receiver of stolen property and a common agitator. Don't take my word for it. Ask Bleyer." Without looking at him he gave a little jerk of the head toward his superintendent. "Who is the most undesirable citizen here, Bleyer? Who makes all the trouble for the companies?"

Bleyer shook his head.

"I can't back my opinion with proof."

"You know what people say. Who do the men rely on to back them whenever they have trouble with us? Out with it."

"Kilmeny is their king pin, the most influential man in camp."

"Of course he is. Anybody could tell to look at him that he was a leader. Does it follow he must be a criminal?" Moya demanded sharply.

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The superintendent smiled. He understood what was behind that irritation.

"You're a good friend, Miss Dwight."

"It's absurd that I am. He did nothing for Joyce and me—except fight for us and see that we were sheltered and fed and brought home safely. Why shouldn't we sit still and let his reputation be torn to tatters?"

Blucher bore down upon the field of Waterloo.

"Of course we're 'for' Mr. Kilmeny, as you Yankees say. I don't care whether he is a highgrader or not. He's a gentleman, and very interesting!" Joyce nodded decisively. "We're *for* him, aren't we, Moya?"

Lady Farquhar smiled and let her embroidery drop to the table as she rose.

"I like him myself," she admitted. "There's something about him that's very attractive. I do hope you are wrong, Mr. Bleyer. He does not look like an anarchist and a thief."

"That is not the way he would define himself. In this community highgrading isn't looked on as theft. Last year our sheriff was suspected of buying ore from miners and shipping it to the smelters. Public opinion does not greatly condemn the practise."

Bleyer, bowing as he spoke, excused himself and withdrew.

Verinder appealed to Lady Farquhar. The indigestion of the newly rich sat heavily upon him. With all his little soul he disliked Jack Kilmeny. Since the man had done so signal a service for Joyce, jealousy gnawed at the heart of the mine-owner.

"Of course we've got to be decent to the man, I suppose. He had a big slice of luck in getting the chance to help Miss Seldon and Miss Dwight. And I don't forget that he is a cousin to our friends. If it wasn't for that, I'd say to mail him a check and wipe the slate clean. But of course——"

"You'd never dare!" breathed Moya tensely. "I won't have him insulted."

"Of course not, under the circumstances. No need to get volcanic, Miss Dwight. I merely suggested what I'd like to do. Now the burden is off my shoulders. I have given you the facts about this young man, Lady Farquhar."

"You've given us only suspicions, Mr. Verinder. I don't think it would be fair to assume them correct," the chaperon answered.

But Moya knew that Verinder had dropped his seed in fruitful soil. Lady Farquhar would not forget. Jack Kilmeny's welcome would be something less than cordial henceforth.

CHAPTER XIII

A HIGHGRADER—IN PRINCIPLE

IN SPITE of the warm defense she had made of Kilmeny, the heart of Moya was troubled. She knew him to be reckless. His views on property and on the struggle between capital and labor were radical. Could it be that they carried him as far as this, that he would take ore to which others had title?

The strange phase of the situation was that nobody in Goldbanks seemed to give any consideration to the moral issue. Between the miners and the operating companies was war. If a workman could get the better of the owners by taking ore, that was a point to his credit. Even Verinder and Bleyer at bottom regarded the matter as a question of strength and not as one of equity.

In her heart she was afraid. Bleyer was a man to be trusted, and in effect he had said that her friend was a highgrader. It would be in keeping with the man's character, as she read it, not to let fear of the consequences hold him from any course upon which he was determined.

As for Joyce, the charges against Kilmeny did not disturb her in the least. He might be all they said of him and more; so long as he interested her that was enough.

A stroll to view the sunset had been arranged by the young people up what was known as Son-of-a-Gun Hill. Moya walked, of course, with Captain Kilmeny, her betrothed. Joyce saw to it that Verinder was paired with India, Jack Kilmeny falling to her lot. Since India knew that her escort was eager to get with Miss Seldon, she punished his impatience by loitering far behind the others.

During the past few days Jack had pushed his tentative suit boldly but lightly. He understood that Joyce was flirting with him, but he divined that there had been moments when the tide of her emotion had swept the young woman from her feet.

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She was a coquette, of course, but when his eyes fell like a plummet into hers they sounded depths beneath the surface foam.

The leading couples stood for a moment's breathing space near the summit. Beneath them the squalid little town huddled in the draw and ran sprawling up the hillsides. Shaft-houses and dumps disfigured even the business street.

Joyce gave a laughing little shudder.

"Isn't it a horrid little hole?"

Jack looked at her in surprise, but it was Moya that answered.

"Oh, I don't think so, Joyce. Of course it's not pretty, but doesn't it seem to stand for something big and—well, indomitable? Think of all the miles of tunnels and stopes, of all the work that has gone into making them." She stopped to laugh at her own enthusiasm before she added: "Goldbanks stands to me for the hope in the human heart that rises in spite of everything. It is the product of an idea."

Miss Seldon gave a little lift to her superb shoulders.

"You're incurably romantic, Moya. It's only a scramble for money after all."

"Don't know about that, Miss Seldon," disagreed Captain Kilmeny. "Of course it's gold they all want. But gold stands for any number of good things, tangible and abstract—success, you know, and home, and love, and kiddies, the better development of the race—all that sort of thing!"

"Is that what it means to the highgraders, too?" Joyce let her smiling eyes rest with innocent impudence in those of the miner.

Kilmeny showed no sign of discomfiture. His gaze met hers fully and steadily.

"Something of that sort, I suppose," he nodded.

"Just what *is* a highgrader?"

Moya held her breath. The debonair lightness of the question could not rob it of its significance. Nobody but Joyce would have dared such a home-thrust.

Jack laughed dryly.

"A highgrader is a miner who saves the company for which he works the trouble of having valuable ore smelted."

"But doesn't the ore belong to the company?"

"There's a difference of opinion about that. Legally it does, morally it doesn't—not all of it. The man who risks his life and the support of his family by working underground is entitled to a share of the profit, isn't he?"

"He gets his wages, doesn't he?"

"Enough to live on if he doesn't want to live too high. But is that all he is entitled to? Your friend—he waved a hand toward Verinder, puffing up the trail a hundred yards below—draws millions of dollars in dividends from the work of these men. What does he do to earn it?"

"You're a socialist," charged Joyce gaily. "Or is it an anarchist that believes such dreadful things?"

"Mr. Kilmeny doesn't quite believe all he says," suggested Moya quietly.

"Don't I?" Behind Jack's quizzical smile there was a hint of earnestness. "I believe that Dobyans Verinder is a parasite in Goldbanks. He gobbles up the product of others' toil."

Joyce flashed at him a swift retort.

"Then if you believe that you ought to be a highgrader yourself."

"Joyce!" reproved Moya, aghast.

"I mean, of course, in principle," her friend amended, blushing slightly at her own audacity.

Her impudence amused the miner.

"Perhaps I am—in principle."

"But only in principle?" she murmured, tilting a radiant challenge at him.

"Exactly — in principle," he agreed. There was humor in his saturnine face.

Joyce ventured one daring step further.

"But, of course, in practise——"

"You should have been a lawyer, Miss Seldon," he countered. "If you were, my reply would be that by advice of counsel I must decline to answer."

"Oh, by advice of counsel! Dear me, that sounds dreadfully legal, doesn't it, Moya? Isn't that what criminals say when——"

"When they don't want to give themselves away. I believe it is," he tossed back with the same lightness. "Before I make confession I shall want to know whether you are on my side—or Verinder's."

UNDER the steady look of his bold, possessive eyes, the long silken lashes fell to the soft cheeks. Joyce understood the unvoiced demand that lay behind the obvious one. He had thrown down the gage of battle.

Was she for Verinder or for him? If he could have offered her one-half the ad-

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vantages of his rival, her answer would not have been in doubt. But she knew she dared not marry a poor man, no matter how wildly his presence could set her pulses flying, or how great her longing for him. Not the least intention of any romantic absurdity was in her mind. When the time came for choice, she would go to Verinder and his millions. But she did not intend to let Jack Kilmeny go yet.

She lifted to him a face flushed and excited, answering apparently his words and not his thoughts.

"I haven't decided yet. How can I tell till I hear what you have to say for yourself?"

"You couldn't find a more charming sister confessor for your sins," the captain told his cousin.

"I'll do my best," Joyce promised. Then, with a flash of friendly malice: "But I haven't had the experience of Moya. She is just perfect in the rôle. I know, because she hears all mine."

Moya flushed resentfully. She did not intend to set up for a prude, but she certainly did not mean to treat highgrading as if it were a joke. If Jack Kilmeny were innocent, why did he not indignantly deny the charge?

"Afraid I'll have to be excused," she said a little stiffly.

"Miss Dwight doesn't approve of me," explained the miner. "If I confessed to her, she would probably turn me over to the sheriff."

The girl's quick eyes flashed into his.

"I don't approve of taking ore that doesn't belong to one, if that's what you mean, Mr. Kilmeny."

Jack liked the flare of temper in her. She was very human in her impulses. At bottom, too, he respected the integrity of mind that refused to compromise with what she thought was wrong.

But no admission of this showed in his strong, brown face. His mordant eyes mocked her while he went into a whimsical argument to show that highgrading was really a virtue since it tended to keep the rich from growing richer and the poor poorer. He wanted to know by what moral right Verinder owned the Mollie Gibson and the Never Quit any more than he did.

The mine-owner, puffing from the exertions of the last bit of ascent, exclaimed indignantly:

"Own 'em, by Jove! Doesn't a Johnny own what he buys and pays for?"

"You don't suppose that when God or Nature or the First Cause created that ore vein, a million million years ago, he had Dobyans Verinder in mind as the owner," derided Kilmeny.

"That's all anarchistic rot, you know. Those mines are my property, at least a commanding interest. They're mine because I bought the shares. Government is founded on a respect for property rights."

"So I've observed," retorted Jack dryly. "I'd back that opinion, too, if I owned half of Goldbanks."

"I suppose Mr. Kilmeny's highgrading friends are superior to law. It isn't necessary for them to abide by the rules society has found best for its protection," Moya suggested.

The engaging smile of the accused rested upon Miss Dwight.

"I met you and your friends in a motor-car yesterday. I'll bet that speedometer said twenty-five miles, but the town ordinance puts the speed limit at fifteen. What about that?"

"You know that's different. No moral question was involved. But when it comes to taking what belongs to another—well, a thief is a thief."

"Right as a rivet, Miss Dwight. But you're begging the question. *Does* that ore belong to Dobyans Verinder any more than it does to—well, to Jack Kilmeny say, for the sake of argument? I go down there and risk my life blasting it out. He——"

"But you don't," interrupted Moya.

"Not today, perhaps, or yesterday. But I did last year and the year before that. I've brought up in my arms the bodies of men torn to pieces, and carried them to their wives and kiddies. How about those women and children? Haven't they earned an interest in the mine? Isn't their moral claim greater than that of Mr. Verinder, who sits in London and draws the dividends?"

"They are pensioned, aren't they?"

"They are not," returned Jack curtly. "The mine-owners of Goldbanks don't believe in encouraging negligence. If these workmen hadn't taken chances they probably would not have been killed, you see. But if they didn't take chances none of the men could earn a living for their families. It is plain how very much to blame they are."

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MOYA looked across the summits of the hills into the brilliant sunset that lay like a wonderful canvas in the crotch of the peaks. A troubled little frown creased her forehead. For the first time there had come home to her the injustice of the social system under which she and her friends thrived. No adequate answer came to her. Verinder and Joyce joined in argument against the young miner, but Moya did not hear what they said.

She was unusually silent on the way home. Once she looked up and asked Captain Kilmeny a question.

"After all, two wrongs don't make a right, do they?"

"No, dear girl. Life's full of injustice. I dare say some of the men I lead are better than Ned Kilmeny, but I've got to forget that and sit tight in the seat that's been dealt me by the cards. If Jack is trying to justify highgrading, he hasn't a leg to stand on."

She sighed.

"You don't think, do you, that——"

He answered her broken sentence.

"Don't know. He doesn't play the game by the same rules we do, but my judgment is that the gossip about him has no basis of fact."

The girl he loved gave him one grateful look and fell again into silence. She wished she felt more sure. Only that morning she had read an editorial in one of the local papers warning the men that the operators were determined to suppress highgrading at any cost, even if some of the more flagrant offenders had to be sent to the penitentiary. That such a fate could befall Jack Kilmeny was unthinkable. Yet what more likely than that the managers should choose him for an example if they could prove him guilty?

The dusk had fallen over the hills, and through the slowly settling blanket of darkness the myriad lights of the town below glimmered and strove to pierce the coming night.

Captain Kilmeny walked beside his slim sweetheart with a heavy heart. She was his promised bride. That she would keep faith he did not doubt.

But the progress that he made in winning her love was so little that he seemed to himself to be marking time. The shadow of his vagabond cousin still lay between them.

CHAPTER XIV

VERINDER SMILES

IN THE gathering gloom Jack and Joyce had come down the hill together far behind the others of the party. They parted on the hotel porch and the young woman went straight to her room and locked the door. Discarding the walking suit she was wearing, she slipped into a tea-gown and sat down to think.

The miner had made love to her—and she had let him do it. Now she was having it out with herself. Always she had felt a good-natured contempt for any girl who threw away substantial advantages for what they called love. Joyce had no intention of marrying a working man, one accused of crime, merely because he was good-looking. The idea was absurd. She was the last woman in the world to make a poor man's wife. Tomorrow she would have a serious talk with him and set matters upon their proper footing.

When Joyce sailed down the corridors to the parlor which adjoined the private dining-room of the party, she caught a glimpse of Verinder turning a corner of the passage toward his room. Lady Farquhar was alone in the parlor.

"Didn't I see Mr. Verinder going out?" asked Joyce, sinking indolently into the easiest chair and reaching for a magazine.

"Yes. At least he was here." After a moment Lady Farquhar added quietly, "He leaves tomorrow."

Joyce looked up quickly.

"Leaves where?"

"Goldbanks. He is starting for London."

"But—what about the reorganization of the companies? I thought——"

"He has changed his plans. James is to have his proxies and to arrange the consolidation. Mr. Verinder is anxious to get away at once."

After an instant's consideration Joyce laughed scornfully. She was dismayed by this sudden move, but did not intend to show it.

"Isn't this rather — hasty? We're all going in a few days. Why can't he wait?"

Her chaperon looked at Joyce as she answered—

"Urgent business, he says."

"Urgent fiddlesticks!" Joyce stifled a manufactured yawn. "I dare say we bore

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him as much as he does us. Wish we were all back in grimy old London."

"It won't be long now." Lady Jim answered with a smile the other suggestions. "No, I don't think business calls him and I don't think he is bored."

Joyce understood the significance of the retort. Verinder at last had revolted against being played with fast and loose. He was going because of her violent flirtation with Jack Kilmeny. This was his declaration of independence.

Miss Seldon was alarmed. She had not for a minute intended to let the millionaire escape. The very possibility of it frightened her. It had not occurred to her that the little man had spirit enough to resent her course so effectively. With the prospect of losing it in sight, his great wealth loomed up to dwarf the desire of the hour. She blamed herself because in the excitement of her affair with Kilmeny she had for the first time in her life let herself forget real values.

But Joyce was too cool a hand to waste time in repining so long as there was a chance to repair the damage. Was the prize lost beyond recovery? Two points were in her favor. Verinder had not yet gone, and he was very much infatuated with her. No doubt his vanity was in arms. He would be shy of any advances. His intention was to beat a retreat in sulky dignity, and he would not respond to any of the signals which in the past had always brought him to heel. It all rested on the fortuity of her getting five minutes alone with him. Granted this, she would have a chance.

There are ways given to women whereby men of his type can be placated. She would have to flatter him by abasing herself, by throwing herself upon his mercy. But since this must be done, she was prepared to pay the price.

It appeared that Dobyans Verinder did not intend to give her an opportunity. From the soup to the walnuts the topic of conversation had to do with the impending departure of the mine-owner. Joyce was prepared to be very kind to him, but he did not for an instant let his eyes dwell in hers. Behind the curtain of her dark silken lashes she was alertly conscious of the man without appearing to be so. He meant to snub her, to leave without seeing her alone. That was to be her punishment for having cut too deep into his self-esteem. He was going to jilt her.

DURING dinner and during that subsequent half-hour while the ladies waited for the men to rejoin them, Joyce was in a tremor of anxiety. But she carried herself with an indifference that was superb. She had taken a chair at the far end of the long parlor close to a French window opening upon a porch. Apparently she was idly interested in a new novel, but never had she been more watchful. If she had a chance to play her hand she would win; if the luck broke against her she would lose.

Most of her friends had mothers to maneuver for them. Joyce had none, but she was not one to let that stand in her way. Already she had made her first move by asking Lord Farquhar in a whisper not to linger long over the cigars. He had nodded silently, and she knew he would keep his word. If Jack would only stay away until she could see Verinder.

She called the mine-owner to her the instant that the men reappeared. He looked across the room sullenly and appeared for one dubious moment to hesitate. But before he could frame an excuse she had spoken again.

"I want you to see this ridiculous illustration. It is the most amusing."

Without any hesitation she had summoned him before them all. He could not rudely refuse her the ordinary civilities that pass current in society. Sulkily he moved to her side.

She held up the book to him. No illustration met the eyes of the surprised man. Joyce was pointing to a sentence in the story heavily underscored by a pencil.

"*Why are you so cruel to me?*"

His chin dropped with amazement. Then slowly an angry flush rose to his face. His jaw set firmly as he looked at her.

"Yes, it's certainly ridiculous—and amusing," he said aloud.

"There's another too," she went on quickly, recovering the book.

Her fingers turned a page or two swiftly. On the margin was a penciled note.

I must see you alone, Dobyans. I must.

She lifted to him a face flushed and eager, from which wounded eyes filmy with tears appealed to him. Her shyness, her diffidence, the childlike call upon his chivalry, were wholly charming. She was a distractingly pretty woman, and she had

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thrown herself upon his mercy. Verinder began insensibly to soften, but he would not give up his grievance.

"It's amusing too—and unnecessary, I think," he said.

The long lashes fluttered tremulously to her cheeks. It seemed to him that she was on the verge of unconsciousness, that the pent emotion was going to prove too much for her.

"I—I think the story calls for it," she answered a little brokenly.

He retorted, still carrying on the conversation that was to mean one thing to the others in case they heard and another to them.

"Depends on the point of view, I suppose. The story is plain enough—doesn't need any more to carry its meaning."

He was standing between her and the rest of the party. Joyce laid an appealing hand on his coat-sleeve. Tears brimmed over from the soft eyes. She bit her lip and turned her head away. If ever a woman confessed love without words Joyce was doing it now. Verinder's inflammable heart began to quicken.

"Where?" he asked grudgingly, lowering his voice.

A glow of triumphant relief swept through her. She had won. But the very nearness of her defeat tempered pride to an emotion still related to gratitude. The warm eyes that met his were alive with thanks. She moved her head slightly toward the window.

IN ANOTHER moment they stood outside, alone in the darkness. The night was chill and she shivered at the change from the warm room. Verinder stepped back into the parlor, stripped from the piano the small Navajo rug that draped it, and rejoined Joyce on the porch. He wrapped it about her shoulders.

She nodded thanks and led him to the end of the porch. For a few moments she leaned on the railing and watched the street-lights. Then abruptly she shot her question at him.

"Why are you going away?"

Stiff as a poker, he made answer.

"Business in London, Miss Seldon. Sorry to leave and all that, but——"

She cut him off sharply.

"I want the truth. What have I done that you should treat me so?"

Anger stirred in him again.

"Did I say you had done anything?"

"But you think I'm to blame. You know you do."

"Do I?" His vanity and suspicion made him wary, though he knew she was trying to win him back. He told himself that he had been made a fool of long enough.

"Yes, you do—and it's all your fault."

She broke down and turned half from him. Deep sobs began to rack her body.

"I'd like to know how it's my fault," he demanded resentfully. "Am I to blame because you broke your engagement to walk with me and went with that thief Kilmeny?"

"Yes." The word fell from her lips so low that he almost doubted his ears.

"What? By Jove, that's rich!"

Her luminous eyes fell full into his, then dropped.

"If—if you can't see——"

"See what? I see you threw me overboard for him. I see you've been flirting a mile a minute with the beggar, and playing fast and loose with me. I'm hanged if I stand it!"

"Oh, Dobyans! Don't you see? I—I— You made me."

"Made you?"

She was standing in profile toward him. He could see the quiver of her lip and the shadows beneath her eyes. Already he felt the lift of the big wave that was to float him to success.

"I—have no mother."

"Don't take the point."

She spoke like a troubled child, as if to the breezes of the night.

"I have to be careful. You know how people talk. Could I let them say that I —ran after you?" The last words were almost in a whisper.

"Do you mean——"

"Oh, couldn't you see? How blind men are!"

The little man, moved to his soul because this proud beauty was so deeply in love with him, took her in his arms and kissed her.

A little shudder went through her blood. But she trod down the momentary nausea with the resolute will that had always been hers. Verinder had paid for the right to caress her. He had offered his millions for the privilege. She too must pay the price for what she received.

"We must go in," she told him presently. "They will wonder."

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"They won't wonder long, by Jove!" he replied, a surge of triumph in his voice.

Joyce looked at him quickly.

"You're not going to tell them tonight?"

He nodded.

"Tonight, my beauty."

"Oh, no. Please not tonight. Let's keep it to ourselves for a few days, dear." The last word was a trifle belated, but that might be because she was not used to it.

Verinder shot a look of quick suspicion at her.

"I'm going to tell them tonight—as soon as we get back into the room."

"But—surely it's for me to say that, Dobyans. I want to keep our little secret for a while."

She caught with her hands the lapels of his dinner jacket and looked pleadingly at him.

"No—tonight!"

He had a good deal of the obstinacy characteristic of many stupid men, but this decision was based on shrewd sense. He held the upper hand. So long as they were in the neighborhood of Jack Kilmeny he intended to keep it.

"Even though I want to wait?"

"Why do you want to wait?" he demanded sullenly. "Because of that fellow Kilmeny?"

She knew that she had gone as far as she dared.

"How absurd! Of course not! Tell them if you like, but—it's the first favor I've asked of you since——"

Her voice faltered and broke. It held a note of exquisite pathos. Verinder felt like a brute, but he did not intend to give way.

"You haven't any real reason, Joyce."

"Isn't it a reason that—I want to keep our engagement just to ourselves for a few days? It's our secret—yours and mine—and I don't want everybody staring at us just yet, Dobyans. Don't you understand?"

"Different here," he answered jauntily. "I want to shout it from the housetop." He interrupted himself to caress her again and to kiss the little pink ear that alone was within reach. "I'll make it up to you a hundred times, but I'm jolly well set on telling them tonight, dear."

SHE gave up with a shrug, not because she wanted to yield but because she must. Her face was turned away from him, so that he did not see the steely look in her eyes and the hard set of the mouth.

She was thinking of Jack Kilmeny. What would he say or do when he was told? Surely he would protect her. He would not give her away. If he were a gentleman, he couldn't betray a woman. But how far would the code of her world govern him? He was primeval man. Would the savage in him break bounds?

Within five minutes she found out. Jack Kilmeny, in evening dress, was jesting in animated talk with India when the engaged couple reëntered the room. He turned, the smile still on his face, to greet Joyce as she came forward beside Verinder. The little man was strutting pompously toward Lady Farquhar, the arm of the young woman tucked under his.

The eyes of Joyce went straight to Kilmeny in appeal for charity. In them he read both fear and shame, as well as a hint of defiant justification.

Even before the mine-owner spoke everybody in the room knew what had happened on the veranda.

"Congratulate me, Lady Farquhar. Miss Seldon has promised to be my wife," Verinder sang out chirpily.

There was a chorus of ejaculations, of excited voices. Joyce disappeared into the arms of her friends, while Farquhar and Captain Kilmeny shook hands with the beaming millionaire and congratulated him. Jack's hands were filled with sheet music, but he nodded across to his successful rival.

"You're a lucky man to have won so true a heart, Mr. Verinder," he said composedly.

Joyce heard the words and caught the hidden irony. Her heart was in her throat. Did he mean to tell more?

Presently it came his turn to wish her joy. Jack looked straight at her. There was a hard smile on his sardonic face.

"I believe the right man has won you, Miss Seldon. All marriages aren't made in Heaven, but— I've been hoping Mr. Verinder would lose out because he wasn't good enough for you. But I've changed my mind. He's just the man for you. Hope you'll always love him as much as you do now."

Joyce felt the color beat into her cheeks. She knew now that Kilmeny was not going to betray her, but she knew too that he understood and despised her.

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CHAPTER XV

A WARNING

JOYCE, a lover of luxury, usually had a roll and coffee in bed as a substitute for breakfast. Sometimes she varied this by appearing late at the table and putting the attendants to unnecessary trouble. This she always paid for with murmurs of apology and sweet smiles of thanks.

On the second morning after the announcement of her engagement to Dobyans Verinder she came down to find the dining-room empty except for the omnibus.

She opened wide eyes of surprise.

"Dear me! Am I late?"

"Yes'm."

She glanced at the watch on her wrist.

"How inconsiderate of me! I didn't realize the time. Would you mind calling a waiter?"

Meanwhile Joyce began on her grapefruit. Almost simultaneously a sound of voices reached her. Men were coming into the parlor that adjoined the breakfast-room.

The high-pitched voice of her affianced lover was the first she recognized.

"Tonight? Sure he said tonight?"

Joyce judged that the rough tones of the answer came from a working man.

"That's right. Tonight, Bell said. He was to bring his wagon round to Kilmeny's at eleven and they were going to haul the ore to Utah Junction."

A third speaker, evidently Bleyer, the superintendent, cut in quietly—

"Bell said it was to be a big shipment, didn't he?"

"Yep. Worth sixty or seventy thousand, he figured."

"Was Bell drunk?"

"I wouldn't say drunk. He had been drinking a good deal. Talkative like. He let it out as a secret, y'understand."

"Any one there besides you?"

"A miner by the name of Peale."

"Know the man?"

It was Verinder that asked the question and Bleyer that answered.

"Yes. A bad lot. One of those that insulted the young ladies."

"Anyhow, he won't warn Kilmeny."

"Not after the mauling that young man gave him. He's still carrying the scars,"

Bleyer replied with a low laugh. He added briskly, after a moment—

"What do you expect to get out of this, Rollins?"

The workman seemed to answer with some embarassment.

"Thought you might give me that lease in the Mollie Gibson I spoke to you about, Mr. Bleyer."

"It's yours—if this comes out as you say, my man. I'd give more than that to call the turn on Mr. Highgrader Kilmeny," Verinder promised.

"And o' course you won't give it away that I told."

"Certainly not!"

The arrival of a waiter eliminated Joyce as a listener, for the first thing the man did was to close the door between the parlor and the dining-room.

But she had heard enough to know that Jack Kilmeny was in danger of falling into a trap that was being set for him. Verinder had him at last, just as he had promised that he would get him. No doubt they would have witnesses and would send him to prison as they had threatened.

No more than forty-eight hours earlier Joyce would have been on Kilmeny's side instantly. Now her feelings were changed. She wanted to pay him with usury for his cool, hard disdain. And she had the chance. All she had to do was to be silent and he would fall a victim to his own folly.

There was a hard glitter in the eyes of the young woman. Perhaps Mr. Highgrader Kilmeny, as Verinder had called him, would not be so prodigal of contempt for other people when he stood in the criminal dock. He had been brutally unkind to her. Was she to blame because he was too poor to support her properly? He ought to thank her for having the good sense not to tie herself like a millstone about his neck. They could not live on love just because for the moment it had swept them from their feet. Instead of being angry at her, he should sympathize with her for being the victim of a pressure which had driven her to a disagreeable duty.

HER simmering anger received a fillip from an accidental meeting with Kilmeny, the first since the night of her engagement. Joyce and Moya were coming out of a stationer's when they came face to face with the miner.

The eyes of the young man visibly hardened. He shook hands with them both and

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exchanged the usual inane greetings as to the weather. It was just as they were parting that he sent his barbed shot into Joyce.

"I mustn't keep you longer, Miss Seldon. One can guess how keen you must be to get back to Verinder. Love's young dream, and that sort of thing, eh?"

The jeer that ran through his masked insolence brought the angry color to the cheeks of Joyce. She bit her lip to keep back tears of vexation, but it was not until she was back in her room with Moya that the need for a confidant overflowed into speech.

"Did you ever hear anything so hateful? He made love to me on the hill—I let him. He knows I—am fond of him. I told him that I loved him. And now——"

Moya stared at her in amaze.

"Do you mean that you let Mr. Kilmeny make love to you an hour or two before you became engaged to Mr. Verinder?"

"For Heaven's sake, don't be a prude, Moya," Joyce snapped irritably. "I told you I was fond of him, didn't I? How could I help his kissing me, or help liking to have him? He ought to be glad. Instead, he insults me." Miss Seldon's self-pity reached the acute stage of sobs. "I was in love with him. Why is he so hard?"

"Perhaps he thinks that since he is in love with you and you with him that gives him some claim," Moya suggested dryly.

"Of course that's what he thinks. But it's absurd. I'm not going to marry Dobyans Verinder because I want to. He knows that as well as you do. Why does he blame me then? Goodness knows, it's hard enough to marry the man without having my friends misunderstand."

Moya asked an unnecessary question—"Why do you marry him then?"

"You know perfectly well," flashed Joyce petulantly. "I'm taking him because I must."

"Like a bad-tasting dose of medicine."

Her friend nodded.

"I can't let him go. I just *can't.* Jack Kilmeny ought to see that."

"Oh, he sees it, but you can't blame him for being bitter."

At the recollection of his impudence anger flared up in Joyce.

"Let him be as bitter as he pleases then. I happen to know something he would give a good deal to learn. Mr. Jack Kilmeny is going to get into trouble this very night. They've laid a plot——"

She stopped, warned by the tense stillness of Moya.

"Yes?" asked the Irish girl.

"Oh, well! It doesn't matter."

"Who has laid a plot?"

"I've no business to tell. I just happened to overhear something."

"What did you overhear?"

"Nothing much."

"I want to know just what you heard."

Against the quiet, steadfast determination of this girl Joyce had no chance. A spirit that did not know defeat inhabited the slender body.

Bit by bit Moya forced out of her the snatch of conversation she had overheard while at breakfast.

"It's a secret. You're not to tell any one!" Joyce protested.

HER friend drummed on the arm of the chair with the tips of her fingers. She was greatly troubled at what she had learned. She was a young woman singularly stanch to her friends, and certainly she owed something to Verinder. The whole party were his guests at Goldbanks. He had brought them in a private car and taken care of them munificently. There were times when Moya disliked him a good deal, but that would not justify an act of treachery. If she warned Jack Kilmeny—and Moya did not pretend to herself for an instant that she was not going to do this—she would have to make confession to Verinder later. This would be humiliating, doubly so because she knew the man believed she was in love with the Goldbanks miner.

In her heart the Irish girl did not doubt that Jack was guilty, but this would not prevent her from saving him if she could. There came to her a swift vision of two helpless girls in a cabin with drinking ruffians, of the entry of a man into the picture, of his fight against odds to save her and Joyce from insult. Beside this, abstract justice became a pale and misty virtue.

"Of course you'll not tell any one," Joyce repeated.

Moya brought her gaze back from the window.

"I shall tell Mr. Kilmeny."

"But it isn't your secret. You have no right to."

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"Have you forgotten that night in the cabin?" asked Moya in a low, clear voice. "If you have, I haven't."

"I don't care," Joyce answered petulantly. "He's so hard. Why can't he be nice about this? Why can't he understand, instead of sneering at me? It's a good deal harder for me than for him. Think of fifty years of Dobyans Verinder."

"Would you care to write Mr. Kilmeny a note? I'll take it to him if you like," Moya suggested gently.

Joyce considered.

"No, I couldn't put it on paper. But—you might tell him."

"I don't think I could quite do that."

"If it came up right; just show him how I'm placed."

"Perhaps. Shall I tell him that you asked me to warn him?"

Joyce nodded, eyes shining. She was a young woman capable of changing her mind in the snap of a finger. Dainty and exquisite as apple-blossoms, she was like a young plant with delicate tendrils forever reaching out. Love she must have and ever more of it. To admiration she was sensitive in every fiber. Whenever she thought of Jack Kilmeny's contempt, tears scorched her eyes.

It was like Moya that she carried her warning immediately and directly. Kilmeny was not easy to find. He had been seen entering the office of a lawyer, but had left before she arrived. The attorney understood Jack to say that he was going to an assayer's office, and the young woman learned there that he had not been seen yet by the assayer. From here she walked toward his boarding-house, thinking that she might catch him at lunch.

A quick step on the board-walk behind her caught the girl's attention. Almost at the same moment a voice hailed her.

"Whither away, Miss Dwight?"

She turned, heart beating fast.

"I was looking for you, Mr. Kilmeny."

"And you've found me. What luck—for Jack Kilmeny!" His friendly smile—the same one that had claimed comradeship on the Gunnison—beamed upon her with its hint of irony.

A miner with a dinner-bucket was coming toward them. Moya spoke quickly.

"I want to see you alone. I've something important to tell you."

His cool eyes searched her face alertly.

"Come up with me to the old Pandora dump."

THEY took a side street that ran up the hill, presently came to the end of it, and stopped at the foot of a trail leading to the abandoned shaft-house.

The girl fired her news at him point-blank.

"Mr. Verinder has found out what you mean to do tonight and you are to be trapped."

"What I mean to do?" he repeated.

"About the ore—shipping it or something. I don't know exactly, somebody was drinking and talked, I think."

Moya, watching Kilmeny's face, saw only the slightest change. The eyes seemed to harden and narrow.

"Tell me all you know about it."

She repeated what Joyce had overheard, adding that her friend had asked her to tell him.

The faintest ironic smile touched his face.

"Will you thank Miss Seldon for me, both for this and many other favors?"

"You don't understand Joyce. You're not fair to her," Moya said impulsively.

"Perhaps not." A sudden warmth kindled in his eyes. "But I know who my real friends are. I'm fair to them, neighbor."

The color beat into her face, but she continued loyally.

"May I—assume you have a kindly interest in Joyce?"

"I'll listen to anything you care to tell me. I owe my friend, Miss Dwight, that much."

"She told me—a little about you and her. Be fair to her. Remember how she has been brought up. All her life it has been drilled into her that she must make a good match. It's a shameful thing. I hate it. But—what can a girl like Joyce do?"

"You justify her?"

"I understand her. A decision was forced on her. She had no time to choose. And, if you'll forgive my saying so, I think Joyce did wisely, since she is what she is."

"Of course she did," he answered bitterly.

"Think of her. She doesn't love him, but she sacrifices her feeling to what she considers her duty."

"Shall we substitute ambition for duty?"

"If you like. Her position is not a happy one, but she must smile and be gay and hide

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her heart-ache. You can afford to be generous, Mr. Kilmeny."

"I've been a fool," he admitted dryly. "The turn that things have taken is the best possible one for me. But I'm not quite prepared to thank Miss Seldon yet for having awakened me."

She saw that his vanity was stung more than his heart. His infatuation for her had been of the senses. The young woman shifted to another issue.

"You'll be careful tonight, won't you?"

"Very. Mr. Verinder will have to wait for his coup, thanks to you."

"You mean . . . ?" The question hung fire on her lips.

"Go on, neighbor!"

"No. It was something I had no business to ask." The cheeks beneath the dusky eyes held each a patch of color burning through the tan.

"Then I'll say it for you. You were going to ask if they would really have caught me with the goods. Wasn't that it?"

She nodded, looking straight at him with the poise of lithe, slim youth he knew so well. Her very breathing seemed for the moment suspended while she waited, tremulous lips apart, for his answer.

"Yes."

"You mean that — you are a high-grader?"

"Yes."

"I—was afraid so."

His eyes would not release her.

"You made excuses for Miss Seldon. Can you find any for me?"

"You are a man. You are strong. It is different with you."

"My sin is beyond the pale, I suppose?"

"How do I know? I'm only a girl. I've never seen anything of real life. Can I judge you?"

"But you do?"

THE troubled virginal sweetness of the girl went to his soul. She was his friend, and her heart ached because of his wrongdoing.

"I can't make myself think wrong is right."

"You think the profits from these mines should all go to Verinder and his friends, that none should belong to the men who do the work."

"I don't know. That doesn't seem fair—but I'm not wise enough to know how to make that right. The law is the law. I can't go back of that."

"Can't you? I can. Who makes the laws?" He asked it almost harshly.

"The people, I suppose."

"Nothing of the kind. The operators control the legislatures and put through whatever bills they please. I went to the legislative assembly once and we forced through an eight-hour law for underground workers. The State Supreme Court, puppets of capital, declared the statute unconstitutional. The whole machinery of government is owned by our masters. What can we do?"

"I don't know."

"Neither do I—except what I am doing. It is against the law all right, but I try to see that the workmen get some of the profits they earn."

"Would the operators—what would they do if they proved you guilty of highgrading?"

"It is hard to prove. Ore can't easily be identified."

"But if they did," she persisted.

"I'd go over the road quick as their courts could send me." A sardonic flicker of amusement moved him to add, "Would you obey the Scriptural injunction and visit me in prison, Miss Dwight?"

"I wouldn't be here. We're going back to England next week."

"But if you were. Would your friendship stand the test?"

Once again she answered "I don't know," her heart beating wildly as her glance fell away from his.

"I sha'n't have to try you out this time, neighbor. I'm not going to the pen if I can help it."

"Are you sure of that? The mine-owners are quite determined to punish some of the highgraders. Suppose I hadn't come to you today. What then?"

He smiled down upon her with the easy recklessness that distinguished him.

"I don't think it would have run quite to a prison sentence. The burden of proof lies on the accuser. Because I am in possession of rich ore, it does not follow that I did not come by it legitimately. Ore can't be sworn to like bric-à-brac. I may have shipped this in from South Africa so far as the law knows. Bleyer knows that. I figure he would have played his hand in the Goldbanks way."

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"And how would that be?"

"He would forget the law too, just as we've done on our side. A posse of men would have fallen on me maybe after I had got out of town, and they would have taken that ore from me. They would have been masked so that I could not swear to them."

"Why, that is highway robbery."

He laughed.

"We don't use such big words out here, ma'am. Just a hold-up—a perfectly legitimate one from Bleyer's viewpoint—and it would have left me broke."

"Broke!"

He nodded.

"Dead broke. I've got twenty thousand dollars invested in that ore, every cent I've got in the world!"

"You paid that to the miners for it?"

"We pay fifty per cent. of what is coming to the men as soon as a rough assay is made, the other fifty after we get the smelter returns. That wagon load of ore is worth, unless I miss my guess badly, about sixty thousand dollars."

"Dear me. So much as that?" She could not quite keep a note of sarcasm out of her voice. "And have you it in a safety deposit vault?"

His cool gaze took her in quietly. He was willing to bet his last dollar on her loyalty, and it was like him to back his judgment in one wild throw.

"Not exactly. It is lying in a pile of hay in my barn, all sacked up ready for shipment."

"Waiting there for anybody that wants it," she suggested.

"For anybody that wants it worse than I do," he corrected, the fighting gleam in his eyes.

"I've a right to ask one thing of you—that there will be no bloodshed tonight because of what I have told you."

"There will be none of my seeking," he replied grimly.

"No. That's not enough. You must find a way to avoid it."

"By handing over my hard-earned dishonest profits to the virtuous Verinder?" he asked dryly.

"I don't care how. But I won't have on my shoulders—murder."

"That's a right hard word, neighbor," he said, falling again into the Western drawl he sometimes used as a mark of his friendship for her. "But have it your own way. I'll not even tote a gat."

"Thank you." She gave him a brisk little nod, suddenly choked up in her throat, and turned to go.

Jack fell into step beside her.

"Have I lost my little friend?"

She swallowed twice and walked on without looking at him. But every nerve of her was conscious of his stimulating presence.

Since the inner man found expression in that lithe body with the undulating flow of well-packed muscles, in the spare head set so finely on the perfect shoulders, in the steady eyes so frank and self-reliant, surely he was not unworthy the friendship of any woman. But he had just confessed himself a thief. What right had he to ask or she to give so much?

Her hand went out in an impetuous little gesture of despair.

"How do I know? You are doing wrong, but . . . Oh, why do you do such things?"

"It's in my blood not to let prudence stop me when I've made up my mind to a thing. My father was that way. I'm trying in a rough way to right an injustice, and I like the excitement, and I dare say I like the loot too," he finished with a reckless laugh.

"I wish I could show you how wrong you are," she cried in a low voice, "how impossible it is——"

"You can't. I'll go my own way. But you are still going to be my friend, aren't you?"

Dry as a whisper came her answer, in a voice which lacked the nonchalance she tried to give it.

"I dare say I'll be as friendly—as you deserve."

"You've got to be a heap more friendly than that, partner."

They had come back to the board-walk which marked the parting of the ways for them. She had won control of herself again and offered him a steady hand.

"I suppose we'll not see each other again so—good-by!"

He dropped her fingers abruptly and said with a steady voice—

"Good-by!"

His crisp footfalls seemed to print themselves on a heart of lead. How could she know that he carried away with him a vision of sweet youth that was to endure!

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CHAPTER XVI

TWO AMBUSHES

THE clock at the new Verinder Building showed ten minutes past eleven as Jack Kilmeny took the Utah Junction road out of Goldbanks with his loaded ore-wagon. It was a night of scudding clouds, through which gleamed occasionally a fugitive moon.

The mountain road was steep and narrow, but both the driver and the mules were used to its every turn and curve. In early days the highgrader had driven a stage along it many a night when he could not have seen the ears of the bronchos.

His destination was the Jack Pot, a mine three miles from town where intermittently for months he had been raising worthless rock in the hope of striking the extension of the Mollie Gibson vein. It was not quite true, as Bleyer had intimated, that his lease was merely a blind to cover ore thefts, though undoubtedly he used it for that purpose incidentally.

Bleyer had guessed shrewdly that Kilmeny would drive out to the Jack Pot, put up in the deserted bunk-house till morning, and then haul the ore down to the junction to ship to the smelter on the presumption that it had been taken from the leased property. This was exactly what Jack had intended to do. Apparently his purpose was unchanged.

He wound steadily up the hill-trail, keeping the animals at an even pull, except for breathing spells. The miner had been a mule-skinner in his time, just as he had tried his hand at a dozen other occupations. In the still night the crack of his whip sounded clear as a shot when it hissed above the flanks of the leaders without touching them.

He ran into the expected ambush a half-mile from the mine, at a point where the road dipped down a wooded slope to a sandy wash.

"Hands up," ordered a sharp voice.

A horseman loomed up in the darkness beside the wagon. A second appeared from the brush. Other figures emerged dimly from the void.

Jack gave his mules the whip and the heavy wagon plowed into the deep sand. Before the wheels had made two revolutions the leaders were stopped. Other men swarmed up the side of the wagon, dragged the driver from his seat, and flung him to the ground.

Even though his face was buried in the sand and two men were spread over his body, the captive was enjoying himself. He squirmed his head around.

"This is no way to treat a man's anatomy—most unladylike conduct I ever saw!" he protested.

He was sharply advised to shut up.

After the pressure on his neck was a little relieved, Jack twisted around enough to see that his captors were all masked.

"What is this game, boys, a hold-up?" he asked.

"Yes. A hold-up of a hold-up," answered one.

Three of the men busied themselves moving the ore-sacks from his wagon to another that had been driven out of the brush. A fourth, whom he judged to be Bleyer, was directing operations, while the fifth menaced him with a revolver shoved against the small of his back.

The situation would have been a serious one—if it had not happened to be amusing instead. Kilmeny wanted to laugh at the bustling energy of the men, but restrained himself out of respect for what was expected of him.

"I'll have the law on you fellows!" he threatened, living up to the situation. "You'd look fine behind the bars, Bleyer."

"All those sacks transferred yet, Tim?" barked the superintendent.

"Yep."

"Good! Hit the trail."

THE wagon passed out of the draw toward Goldbanks. For some minutes the sound of the wheels grinding against the disintegrated granite of the roadbed came back to Jack and the two guards who remained with him.

"Hope this will be a lesson to you," said the superintendent presently. "Better take warning. Next time you'll go to the pen sure."

"Wait till I get you into court, Bleyer."

"What'll you do there?" jeered the other man. "Your word wouldn't stick. You're sewed up tight this time, Jack."

"Am I? Bet you a new hat that by this time tomorrow night you fellows won't be cracking your lips laughing."

"Take you. Just order the hat left at Goldstein's for the man who calls for it."

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For an hour by the superintendent's watch Kilmeny was held under guard. Then, after warning the highgrader not to return to town before daybreak, the two men mounted and rode swiftly away. Jack was alone with his mules and his empty wagon.

He restrained himself no longer. Mirth pealed in rich laughter from his throat, doubled him up, shook him until he had to hang on to a wagon-wheel for support. At last he wiped tears from his eyes, climbed into the wagon, and continued on the way to the Jack Pot.

At intervals his whoop of gaiety rang out boyishly on the night breeze. Again he whistled cheerfully. He was in the best of humor with himself and the world. For he had played a pretty good joke on Bleyer and Verinder, one they would appreciate at its full within a day or two. He would have given a good deal to be present when they made a certain discovery. Would Moya smile when Verinder told her how the tables had been turned? Or would she think it merely another instance of his depravity?

The road wound up and down over scarred hillsides and through gorges which cut into the range like sword clefts. From one of these it crept up a stiff slope toward the Jack Pot. A hundred and fifty yards from the mine Jack drew up to give the mules a rest.

His lips framed themselves to whistle the first bars of a popular song, but the sound died still-born. Sharply through the clear night air rang a rifle-shot.

Jack did not hear it. A bolt of jagged lightning seared through his brain. The limp hands of the driver fell away from the reins and he fell to the ground, crumpling as a dry leaf that is crushed in the palm.

From the shadow of the bunk-house two men stole heavily into the moonlight like awkward beasts of prey. They crept stealthily forward, rifles in hand, never once lifting their eyes from the huddled mass beside the wagon.

The first looked stolidly down upon the white face and kicked the body with his heavy boot.

"By Goad, Dave, us be quits wi' Jack Kilmeny."

The other—it was Peale, the Cornish miner—had stepped on a spoke of the wheel and pulled himself up so that he could look down into the bed of the wagon. Now he broke out with an oath.

"The wagon's empty!"

"What!" Trefoyle straightened instantly, then ran to see for himself. For a moment he could not speak for the rage that surged up in him. "The dommed robber has made fool of us'n!" he cried savagely.

In their fury they were like barbarians, cursing impotently the man lying with a white face shining in the moonlight. They had expected to pay a debt of vengeance and to win a fortune at the same stroke. The latter they had missed. The disappointment of their loss stripped them to stark primeval savagery. It was some time before they could exult in their revenge.

"He'll interfere wi' us no more—not this side o' hell anyway," Peale cried.

"Not he. An' we'll put him in a fine grave where he'll lie safe."

They threw the body into the wagon and climbed to the seat. Peale drove along an unused road that deflected from the one running to the Jack Pot.

CHAPTER XVII

MR. VERINDER IS TREATED TO A SURPRISE

THE morning after the seizing of the ore Verinder came to breakfast in a mood so jubilant that he could not long keep to himself the cause of his exultation. Kilmeny and Farquhar were away on a hunting trip, and none of the ladies except Moya was yet up. He was especially eager to tell his news to her, because she had always been such an open defender of the highgrader. She gave him his opening very promptly, for she was anxious to know what had occurred.

"Has some distant connection passed away and left you a fortune, Mr. Verinder? Or have you merely found a new gold-mine since I saw you last?" she asked.

"By Jove, you're a good guesser, Miss Dwight! I found a gold-mine last night. Wonder if you could think where."

Her heart beat faster.

"You're so pleased about it I fancy the quartz must have been sacked up for you ready for the smelter," she said carelessly.

Verinder flashed a quick look at her.

"Eh, what? How's that?"

Moya opened her lips to confess what she had done, but the arrival of a waiter de-

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layed this. Before he had left, Lady Farquhar entered and the girl's chance was temporarily gone.

"I was just telling Miss Dwight that we've found another gold-mine, Lady Farquhar—and of all places in the world located in the bed of a wagon."

"In the bed of a wagon! How could that be?"

"Fact, 'pon my word! High-grade ore, too, we fancy; but we'll know more about that when we hear from the assayer."

The matron intercepted the look of triumph—it was almost a jeer—that the mine-owner flung toward Miss Dwight. She did not understand what he was talking about, but she saw that Moya did.

"If you'd tell us just what happened we'd be able to congratulate you more intelligently," the latter suggested, masking her anxiety.

"Jove, I wish I could—like to tell you the whole story. We pulled off a ripping surprise on one of your friends. But the deuce of it is, I'm sworn to secrecy. We played the highgraders' game and stepped a bit outside the law for once. Let it go at this, that the fellow had to swallow a big dose of his own medicine."

Moya pushed one more question home.

"Nobody hurt, I suppose?"

"Only his feelings and his pocketbook. But I fancy one highgrader has learned that Dobyans Verinder knows his way about a bit, you know."

The subject filled Moya's thoughts all day. Had Kilmeny after all failed to take advantage of her warning? Or had his opponents proved too shrewd for him? From what Verinder had told her she surmised that Jack had tried to reach the railroad with his ore and been intercepted. But why had he not changed his plans after her talk with him? Surely he was not the kind of man to walk like a lamb into a trap baited for him.

LATE in the afternoon Moya, dressed in riding costume, was waiting on the hotel porch for India and her brother when she saw Verinder coming down the street. That he was in a sulky ill-humor was apparent.

"Lord Farquhar and Captain Kilmeny came back a couple of hours ago," she said by way of engaging him in talk.

"Any luck?" he asked morosely and with obvious indifference to any answer.

"A deer apiece and a bear for the captain."

"That fellow Kilmeny outwitted us after all," he broke out abruptly. "We've been had, by Jove! Must have been what Bleyer calls a plant."

"I don't understand."

"The rock we took from him was refuse stuff—not worth a dollar."

The girl's eyes gleamed.

"Your gold-mine was salted then."

"Not even salted. He had gathered the stuff from some old dump."

"He must have profited by my warning after all," Moya said quietly.

The little man's eyes narrowed.

"Eh? How's that? Did you say 'your warning'?"

In spite of herself she felt a sense of error at having played the traitor to her host.

"Sorry. I didn't like to do it, but——"

"What is it you did?" he asked bluntly.

"I told Mr. Kilmeny that his plan was discovered."

"You—told him?" He subdued his anger for the moment. "If it isn't asking too much, how did you know anything about it?"

She felt herself flushing with shame, but she answered lightly enough—

"You shouldn't discuss secrets so near the breakfast-room, Mr. Verinder."

"I see. You listened—and then you ran to your friend the highgrader with the news. That was good of you, Miss Dwight. I appreciate it—under the circumstances."

She knew he referred to the fact that she was his guest. To hear him put into words his interpretation of the thing she had done, with implications of voice and manner that were hateful, moved her to a disgust that included both him and herself.

"Thank you, Mr. Verinder, for all the kind things you mean and can't say."

She turned on her heel and walked to the end of the veranda. After a moment's thought he followed her.

"Have I said a word too much, Miss Dwight? You did listen to a private conversation you weren't meant to hear, didn't you? And you ran to your friend with it? If I'm wrong, please correct me."

"I dare say you're right. We'll let it go at that, if you please."

Verinder was irritated. Clearly in the

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right, he had allowed her to put him in the wrong.

"I'll withdraw listened, Miss Dwight. Shall we substitute overheard?"

Her angry eyes flashed into his cold hard ones.

"What would you expect me to do? You know what he did for Joyce and me. And he is Captain Kilmeny's cousin. Could I let him go to prison without giving even a warning?"

"Evidently not. So you sacrificed me for him."

"You think I wasn't justified."

"You'll have to settle that with your conscience," he said coldly. "Don't think I would have been justified in your place."

"You would have let him go to prison—the man who had fought for you against odds?"

"Does that alter the fact that he is a thief?" Verinder demanded angrily.

"It alters my relation to the fact, and it ought to alter yours! He did a great service to the woman you are engaged to marry. Does that mean nothing to you?"

"The fellow was playing off his own bat, wasn't he? I don't see I owe him anything," the mine-owner sulkily answered. "Truth is, I'm about fed up with him. He's a bad lot. That's the long and short of him. I won't deny he's a well plucked daredevil. What of it? This town is full of them. There was no question of his going to prison. I intended only to get back some of the ore he and his friends have stolen from me."

"I didn't know that."

"Would it have made any difference if you had?"

She considered.

"I'm not sure," she at length replied.

CAPTAIN KILMENY and India emerged from the hotel and bore down upon them.

"All ready, Moya," cried India.

"Ready here."

Moya knew that it must be plain to both Captain Kilmeny and his sister that they had interrupted a disagreement of some sort. Characteristically, she took the bull by the horns.

"Mr. Verinder and I are through quarreling. At least I'm through. Are you?" she asked the mine-owner with a laugh.

"Didn't know I'd been quarreling, Miss Dwight," Verinder replied stiffly.

"You haven't. I've been doing it all." She turned lightly to her betrothed. "They didn't send up the pinto, Ned. Hope he hasn't really gone lame."

Verinder had been put out of the picture. He turned and walked into the lobby of the hotel, suddenly resolved to make a complaint to Lady Farquhar about the way Moya Dwight had interfered with his plans. He would show that young lady whether she could treat him so outrageously without getting the wigging she deserved.

Lady Farquhar listened with a contempt she was careful to veil. It was not according to the code that a man should run with the tale of his injuries to a young woman's chaperon. Yet she sympathized with him even while she defended Moya. No doubt if Captain Kilmeny had been at hand his fiancée would have taken the matter to him for decision. In his absence she had probably felt that it was incumbent on her to save his cousin from trouble.

The mine-owner received Lady Farquhar's explanations in skeptical silence. In his opinion Moya's interest in Jack Kilmeny had nothing to do with the relationship between that scamp and the captain. He would have liked to say so flatly, but he felt it safer to let his manner convey the innuendo. In her heart Lady Farquhar was of the same belief. She resolved to have a serious talk with Moya before night.

CHAPTER XVIII

COLTER TAKES A HAND

MOYA combed her long, rippling hair while Lady Farquhar laid down the law that hedges a young woman from the satisfaction of her generous impulses. For the most part the girl listened in silence, a flush burning through each of her dusky cheeks. There was nothing to be said that would avail. She might defend the thing she had done, but not the feelings that had inspired her action.

"It is all very well to be independent within limits, my dear, but young women of our class are subject to the penalties that go with our privileges. When I was a girl I rebelled but had to obey. So must you." Lady Farquhar interrupted herself to admire the vivid rebel she was admonishing. "What wonderful hair you have—so long

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and thick and wavy! It must take a great deal of care."

"Yes," Moya admitted absently.

She did not resent the rebuke Lady Jim had come to give her while she was undressing. No doubt she deserved it. She had been unmaidenly, and all for love of this light-hearted vagabond who did not care the turn of a hand for her.

In the shipwreck of her self-respect she clung to one spar. Soon they would be on their way back to the well-ordered world where she would be entirely in the groove of convention. Her engagement to Captain Kilmeny would be announced. Surely among the many distractions of London she would forget this debonair scamp who had bewitched her.

"You should have come to me, or to India for that matter. She is his cousin and is in a different position from you. Don't you see that, my dear?" Lady Farquhar asked gently.

And again Moya said "Yes" wearily.

"James and I understand you—how impulsive you are—and how generous. But Mr. Kilmeny—and Mr. Verinder—what do you suppose they think?"

"I don't care what Mr. Verinder thinks." And Moya began to coil her hair loosely for the night.

"But that's just it, a girl *must* care! She can't afford to allow any one an opportunity to think unpleasant things about her. She has to guard her reputation very jealously."

"And I suppose I've been playing ducks and drakes with mine," Moya said, pushing home a hairpin.

"I don't say that, dear. What I say is that Mr. Kilmeny may misunderstand your interest in him."

"He may think I'm in love with him. Is that it?" flashed the girl.

"He might. Give a man's vanity the least chance and——"

A reckless impulse to hurt herself—the same which leads a man to grind on an aching tooth in heady rage—swept Moya like a flame.

"Then he would think the truth," she interrupted. "What's the use of denying it? I—I *am* in love with him."

"Moya!" Lady Farquhar's protest came in a horrified gasp.

The young woman turned her slim body in the chair with supple grace so as to face her chaperon. Beneath the dark eyes spots of color burned through the tan.

"It's true. I've cared—ever since we met him."

"And he—has he ever made love to you?"

"Never. He's thought only of Joyce. That's what makes it more shameless."

Lady Farquhar took a moment to absorb the unwelcome news.

"I never dreamed it was as bad as this. Of course I knew he interested you a good deal, but——"

"But you didn't think I was so lost to decency as to throw myself at his head. You see I am." Moya could not keep scorn of herself out of her voice.

"Nonsense!" cut in her chaperon with sharp common sense. "You're not the first girl that has fancied a man who won't do. It's imagination, a good deal of it. Make yourself forget him. That's all you can do."

"I can't do that. I've tried," confessed Moya miserably.

"Then try again, and again, and still again. Remember that you are engaged to a man worth a dozen of him. Call your pride to help you."

"It seems that I have none. I've told myself forty times that he's a highgrader, and that doesn't help."

Her friend was alarmed.

"You don't mean that you would marry a man who is a—a man who steals ore."

"No. I wouldn't marry him—even if he wanted me, which he doesn't. I haven't fallen that far."

"Glad to hear you say that," answered Lady Farquhar with a sigh of relief.

She took the girl in her arms and patted one of the shoulders over which the hair cascaded.

"My dear, it's hard," she went on. "You're intense and emotional. But you've got to—to buck up, as James says. You're brave—and you're strong-willed. Make a winning fight."

"What about—Ned?"

"Does he suspect?"

"I don't know. Sometimes I think he does. But you know how generous he is. He never says anything, or avoids the subject of his cousin in any way." She added after an instant: "Ned knows that I don't —love him—that is, in one way. He says he is ready to wait till that comes."

"Ned Kilmeny is a man out of a million."

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"Yes," Moya nodded. "That's why this is so unfair to him. What ought I to do? Shall I break the engagement? That's what I want to do, but it will hurt him a good deal."

"Wait. Give yourself and him a chance. In a few days we'll be started home."

"That's what I've been telling myself. Everything here reminds me of him. It will be different then, I try to think. But down in my heart I don't think it will."

"And I know it will," the matron told her promptly. "Time, my dear, heals all our woes. Youth has great recuperative power. In a year you will wonder how he ever cast such a spell over you."

MOYA heard the last belated reveler pass down the corridor to his room before she fell asleep. When she awoke, it was to see a long shaft of early sunshine across the bed.

She rose, took her bath, and dressed for walking. Her desire drew the steps of the young woman away from the busy street toward the suburb. She walked, as always, with the elastic resilience of unfettered youth. But the weight that had been at her heart for two days — since she had learned from Jack Kilmeny's lips that he was a highgrader—was still tied there too securely to be shaken away by the wonder of the glorious new-born day.

Returning to the hotel, she met a man on the porch whose face stirred instantly a fugitive memory. He came to her at once, a big leather-skinned man with the weather-beaten look of the West.

"Aren't you the Miss Dwight I've heard Jack Kilmeny mention?"

"Yes. This is Mr. Colter, isn't it?"

He nodded, watching her with hard, narrowed eyes.

"Something's wrong. Can you tell me what it is? Jack's mules—two of them anyhow—came back to the barn during the night with bits of broken harness still attached to them. Looks like there had been a runaway and the wagon had come to grief. The keeper of the livery stable says Bell took the wagon around to Jack's place and left it with him. He was seen driving out of town soon after. He has not been seen since."

Her heart flew to alarm.

"You mean you think he has been hurt?"

"Don't know. He's not in town. That's a cinch. I've raked Goldbanks with a toothcomb. Where is he?"

"Couldn't he be at his mine?"

"I sent a boy out there. He's not at the Jack Pot."

"What is it that you think? Tell me," she cried softly.

"You're his friend, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"There's some talk around town that he was held up by Bleyer. I came up here to see him or Verinder. Foul play of some kind, that's my guess."

"But—you surely don't think that Mr. Bleyer or Mr. Verinder would hurt him."

The look of dogged resolution on the man's granite face did not soften.

"They'll have to show me—and if they did——"

Her mind flew with consternation to the attack upon Kilmeny that had been made by Bleyer. But Verinder had told her nobody had been hurt. Could they have taken the highgrader prisoner? Were they holding him for some purpose?

"Mr. Verinder gets up about this time usually," she said.

"I'm waiting for him. He said he would be down at once."

"Will you tell me anything you find out, please? I'll be on the veranda upstairs."

COLTER joined her a quarter of an hour later at the appointed place.

"I saw both Bleyer and Verinder. They've got something up their sleeve, but I don't think they know where Jack is or what has become of him. They pretended to think I was trying to put one over on them."

"What will you do now?"

"I'll go out to the Jack Pot myself. I've reason to believe he intended to go there."

"If you find out anything——"

"Yes, I'll let you know."

Moya went directly from Colter to Bleyer. The superintendent entered a curt denial to her implied charge.

"Miss Dwight, I don't know what you do or do not know. I see some one has been blabbing. But I'll just say this: When I last saw Jack Kilmeny he was as sound as I am this minute. I haven't the least idea where he is. You don't need to worry about him at all. When he wants to turn up he'll be on deck, right side up. Don't ask me what his play is, for I don't know.

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It may be to get me and Verinder in bad with the miners. Just be sure of one thing —he's grandstanding!"

She was amazingly relieved.

"I'm so glad. I thought perhaps——"

"—That Mr. Verinder and I had murdered him? Thanks for your good opinion of us, but really we didn't," he retorted in his dryest manner.

She laughed.

"I did think perhaps you knew where he was."

"Well, I don't—and I don't want to," he snapped. "The less I see of him the better I'll be satisfied."

The superintendent of the Verinder properties had found a note addressed to him in one of the sacks of quartz taken from Kilmeny. The message, genial to the point of impudence, had hoped he had enjoyed his little experience as a hold-up. To Bleyer, always a serious-minded man, this levity had added insult to injury. Just now the very mention of the highgrader's name was a red rag to his temper. It was bad enough to be bested, without being jeered at by the man who had set a trap for him.

It was well on toward evening before Colter paid his promised visit to Miss Dwight. She found him waiting for her upon her return from a ride with Captain Kilmeny, Verinder and Joyce.

Moya, as soon as she had dismounted, walked straight to him.

"What have you found out, Mr. Colter?"

"Not much. It rained during the night and wiped out the tracks of wagon-wheels. Don't know how far Jack got or where he went, but the remains of the wagon are lying at the bottom of a gulch about two miles from the Jack Pot."

"How did it get there?"

"I wish you could tell me that. Couldn't have been a runaway or the mules would have gone over the edge of the road too." He stepped forward quickly as Verinder was about to pass into the hotel. "I want to have a talk with you."

The little man adjusted his monocle.

"Ye-es. What about, my man?"

"About Jack Kilmeny. Where is he? What do you know? I'm going to find out if I have to tear it from your throat."

Verinder was no coward, but he was a product of our modern super-civilization. He glanced around hastily. The captain had followed Joyce into the lobby. Moya and he were alone on the piazza with this big savage who looked quite capable of carrying out his threat.

"Don't talk damned nonsense!" the mine-owner retorted, flushing angrily.

Colter did not answer in words. The strong muscular fingers of his left hand closed on the right arm of Verinder just below the shoulder with a pressure excruciatingly painful. Dobyans found himself moving automatically toward the end of the porch. He had to clench his teeth to keep from crying out.

"Let me alone, you brute!" he gasped.

COLTER paid no attention until his victim was backed against the rail in a corner. Then he released the millionaire he was manhandling.

"You're going to tell me everything you know. Get that into your head. Or, by —— I'll wring your neck for you."

The Englishman had never before been confronted with such a situation. He was a citizen of a country where wealth hedges a man from such assaults. The color ebbed from his face, then came back with a rush.

"Go to the devil, you big bully!" he flung out sharply.

Moya, taken by surprise at Colter's abrupt desertion of her, had watched with amazement the subsequent flare-up. Now she crossed the porch toward them.

"What are you doing, Mr. Colter?"

"None of your funeral, ma'am!" the miner answered bluntly, not for a moment lifting his hard eyes from Verinder. "Better unload what you know. I've had a talk with Quint Saladay. I know all he knows, that Bleyer and you and him with two other lads held up Jack and took his ore away. The three of them left you and Bleyer guarding Jack. What did you do with him?"

"It's a bally lie! I didn't stay with Bleyer to guard him."

"That's right. You didn't. You came back with the others. But you know what Bleyer did. Out with it!"

"I don't admit a word of what you say," said Verinder doggedly.

Colter had trapped him into a half-admission, but he did not intend to say any more.

Moya spoke a little timidly.

"Wait a minute please, Mr. Colter. Let me talk with Mr. Verinder alone. I think he'll tell me what you want to know."

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Jack's friend looked at her with sharp suspicion. Was she trying to make a dupe of him? Her candid glance denied it.

"All right. Talk to him all you like, but you'll do your talking here," he agreed curtly before he turned on his heel and walked away a few steps.

"You must tell him what he wants to know, Mr. Verinder," urged the young woman in a low voice. "Something has happened to his friend. We must help clear it up."

"I'm not responsible for what has happened to his friend. What do you want me to do? Peach on Bleyer, is that it?"

"No. Send for him—and tell Mr. Colter the truth."

"I'll see him hanged and quartered first!" he replied angrily.

"If you don't, I'll tell what I know. There's a life at stake!" Moya cried, a trace of agitation in her voice.

"Fiddlesticks!" he shrugged. "The fellow's full of tricks. He worked one on us the other night. I'm hanged if I let him play me again."

"You must. I'll tell Captain Kilmeny and Lord Farquhar. I'll not let it rest this way. The matter is serious."

"I'm not going to be bullied into saying a word. That's the long and short of it," he repeated in disgust. "Let Bleyer tell the fellow if he wants to. I'll have nothing to do with it. We're not responsible for what has happened—if anything has."

"Then I'll go and get Mr. Bleyer."

"Just as you please. I'd see this ruffian at Halifax first, if you ask *me*." And the angry color flushed his face again as he thought of the insult to which he had been subjected.

To Colter Moya explained her purpose. He nodded agreement without words.

After two or three attempts she got the superintendent on the telephone at the Mollie Gibson mine and arranged with him that he was to come to the hotel at once. A few minutes later he drove up in his car.

Moya put the case to him.

Bleyer turned to his employer.

"You want me to tell Colter what I know?"

"I don't care a turn of my hand whether you tell the fellow or not," drawled Verinder, ignoring the presence of Colter.

The superintendent peered at Moya in his near-sighted fashion over the glasses on his nose.

"Can't see that it matters much, Miss Dwight. I'm not worrying a bit about Jack Kilmeny, but if Colter and you are, I'm willing to tell what I know on condition that you keep the facts to yourselves."

"I'll keep quiet if you haven't injured Jack in any way," Colter amended.

"We haven't. He was sound as a new dollar when I left him Tuesday night. Want to hear the particulars?"

"That's what I'm here for," snapped Colter.

Bleyer told the whole story so far as he knew it.

CHAPTER XIX

SPIRIT-RAPPING?

FARQUHAR and Captain Kilmeny left next day for another short hunting trip. The captain had offered to give it up, but Moya had urged upon him that it would not be fair to disappoint his companion. He had gone reluctantly, because he saw that his fiancée was worried. His own opinion was that his cousin Jack had disappeared for reasons of his own.

Colter did not relax in his search. But as the days passed hope almost died within him. Jack had plenty of enemies, as an aggressive fighter in a new country always must have. His friend's fear was that some of them had decoyed Kilmeny to his death. The suspicions of the miner centered upon Peale and Trefoyle, both because Jack had so recently had trouble with them and because they knew beforehand of his intention to remove the ore. But he could find no evidence upon which to base his feeling, though he and Lundy, in company with a deputy sheriff, had put the Cornishmen through a grilling examination.

It had been understood that the young women should take a trip through the Never Quit before they left Goldbanks, but for one reason or another this had been postponed until after the captain and Farquhar had started on their final hunting expedition. The second afternoon after their departure was the one decided upon for the little adventure.

Verinder, with the extravagance that went hand in hand with an occasional

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astonishing parsimony, had ordered oil-skin suits and waterproof boots made especially for his guests. A room was reserved for the young ladies at the mine, equipped for this one occasion to serve as a boudoir where they might dress in comfort.

The mine-owner's guests donned with a good deal of hilarious merriment the short skirts, the boots and the rubber helmets. The costumes could not have been called becoming, but they were eminently suited for the wet, damp tunnels of the Never Quit.

After they had entered the cage it was a little terrifying to be shot so rapidly down into the blackness of the mine.

"Don't be afraid. It's quite safe," Bleyer told them cheerfully.

At the tenth level the elevator stopped and they emerged into an open space.

"We're going to follow this drift," explained the superintendent.

They seated themselves in ore-cars and were wheeled into a cavern lighted at intervals by electric bulbs. Presently the cars slowed down and the occupants descended.

"This way," ordered Bleyer.

They followed in single file into a hot, damp tunnel which dripped moisture in big drops from the roof upon a rough, uneven floor of stone and dirt, where pools of water had occasionally gathered. The darkness increased as they moved forward, driven back by the candles of the men for a space scarcely farther than they could reach with outstretched hands.

Moya, bringing up the rear, could hear Bleyer explain the workings to those at his heel. He talked of stopes, drifts, tunnels, wage scales, shifts, high-grade ore, and other subjects that were as Greek to Joyce and India.

The atmosphere was oppressively close and warm, and the oil-skins that Moya wore seemed to weight heavily upon her. She became aware with some annoyance at herself that a faintness was stealing over her brain and a mistiness over her eyes. To steady herself she stopped, catching at the rough wall for support. The others, unaware that she was not following, moved on. With a half-articulate little cry she sank to the ground.

WHEN she came to herself the lights had disappeared. She was alone in the most profound darkness she had ever known. It seemed to press upon her so heavily as almost to be tangible. The girl was frightened. Her imagination began to conjure all sorts of dangers. Of cave-ins and explosions she had heard and read a good deal. Anything was possible in this thousand-foot-deep grave. In a frightened, ineffective little voice she cried out to her friends.

Instantly there came an answer—a faint tapping on the wall almost at her ear. She listened breathlessly and caught again that faint, far tap—tap—tap—tap—tap—tap—tap! Instinctively her hand went out, groping along the wall until it fell upon a pipe. Even as she touched this the sound came again, and along with it the faintest of vibrations. She knew that somebody at a distance was hitting the pipe with a piece of quartz or metal.

Stooping, she found a bit of broken rock. Three times she tapped the pipe. An answer came at once.

Tap—tap—tap—tap—tap—tap—tap!

She tried two knocks. Again the response of seven sounded. Four blows brought still seven. Why always seven? She did not know, but she was greatly comforted to know that her friends were in communication with her. After all she was not alone.

A light glimmered at the end of the tunnel and moved slowly toward her. Bleyer's voice called her name. Presently the whole party was about her with sympathetic questions and explanations.

She made light of her fainting attack, but Verinder insisted on getting her back to the upper air in spite of her protests. He had discovered that Joyce was quite ready to return to the sunlight now that her curiosity was satisfied. A very little of anything that was unpleasant went a long way with Miss Seldon, and there was something about this underground tomb that reminded her strongly of an immense grave.

At dinner Verinder referred to the attack of vertigo.

"Feel quite fit again, Miss Dwight?"

"Quite, thank you." Moya was a little irritated at the reference, because she was ashamed of having given way to physical weakness. "It was nothing. I was a goose. That's all."

Bleyer, a guest for the evening, defended the young woman from her own scorn.

"It often takes people that way the first time, what with the heat and the closeness.

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I once knew a champion pugilist to keel over while he was going through a mine."

"Were you afraid when you found yourself alone?" Joyce asked.

"I was until you tapped."

India looked puzzled.

"Tapped. What do you mean?"

"On the pipe."

"What pipe?"

"The one that ran through the tunnel."

Miss Kilmeny shook her head.

"I didn't see anybody tap. Perhaps one of us touched it by chance."

"No. That couldn't be. The tap came seven times together, and then, after I had answered it, seven times more."

"Seven times?" asked Bleyer quickly.

"Yes—seven. But if you didn't tap, who did?"

"Sure it wasn't imagination?" Verinder suggested.

"Imagination! I tell you it was repeated again and again," Moya said impatiently.

"Spirit-rapping," surmised Joyce lightly. "It doesn't matter anyhow, since it served its work of comforting Moya."

"It might have been some of the workmen," Lady Farquhar guessed.

"Must have been," agreed Bleyer. "And yet—we're not working that end of the mine now. The men had no business there. Odd that it was seven raps. That is a call for help. It means danger."

A bell of warning began to toll in Moya's heart. It rang as yet no clear message to her brain, but the premonition of something sinister and deadly sent a sinking sensation through her. Verinder sat up with renewed interest.

"I say, you know—spirit-rapping. Weren't you telling me, Bleyer, that there was a big accident there some years ago? Perhaps the ghosts of some of the lost miners were sending a message to their wives. Eh, what?"

"The accident was in the Golden Nugget, an adjoining mine. The property was pretty well worked out and has never been opened since the disaster."

The color had ebbed from Moya's lips. She was a sane young woman not given to nerves. But she had worried a great deal over the disappearance of Jack Kilmeny. This, coming on top of it, shook her composure. For she was fighting with the dread that the spirit of the man she loved had been trying to talk with her.

"How weird!" Joyce chattered gaily. "Moya, you must write an account of your experience for the Society of Psychical Research. Put me in it, please."

"Of course it must have been some of the men, but I don't see——"

Moya interrupted the superintendent sharply. An intuition, like a flash of light, had illumined her brain.

"Where does that pipe run, Mr. Bleyer?"

"Don't know. Maps of the workings at the office would show."

"Will you please find out?"

"Glad to look it up for you, Miss Dwight. I'm a little curious myself."

"I mean now—at once."

He glanced at her in quick surprise. Was she asking him to leave the dinner-table to do it? Lady Farquhar saw how colorless Moya was and came to the rescue.

"My dear, you are a little unstrung, aren't you?" she said gently. "I think we might find something more cheerful to talk about. We always have the weather."

Moya arose, trembling.

"No. I know now who called for help. It was Jack Kilmeny."

Verinder was the first to break the strained silence.

"But that's nonsense, you know."

"It's the truth. He was calling for help."

"Where from? What would he be doing down in a mine?"

"I don't know. He may have fallen down there, or—yes, I do too," Moya corrected herself, voice breaking under the stress of her emotion. "He has been put down there to die."

"To die!" Joyce echoed the words in a frightened whisper.

"This is absurd," Dobyans laughed. "Who under heaven would put him there?"

A second flash of light burned in upon the girl.

"That man Peale—and the other ruffian. They knew about the shipment just as you did. They waylaid him and buried him in some old mine."

Moya faced them tensely, a slim wraith of a girl with dark eyes that blazed. She had forgotten all about conventions, all about what they would think of her. The one thing she saw was Jack Kilmeny in peril, calling for help.

But Lady Farquhar remembered what Moya did not. It was her duty to defend her charge against the errant impulses of

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the heart, to screen them from the callous eyes of an unsympathetic world.

"You jump to conclusions, my dear. Sit down and we'll talk it over."

"No. He called for help. I'm going to take it to him."

Again Verinder laughed unpleasantly. Moya did not at that moment know the man was in existence. One sure purpose flooded her whole being. She was going to save her lover.

India wavered. She too had lost color.

"But—you're only guessing, dear."

"You'll find it's true. We must follow that pipe and rescue him. Tonight!"

"Didn't know you were subject to nerve attacks, Miss Dwight," derided Verinder uneasily.

Moya put her hands in front of her eyes as if to shut out the picture of what she saw.

"He's been there for five days—starving maybe," she shuddered.

"You're only guessing, Miss Dwight. What facts have you to back it?" Bleyer asked.

"We must start at once—this very hour." Moya had recovered herself and spoke with quiet decision. "But first we must find where the pipe leads."

Bleyer answered the appeal in Lady Farquhar's eyes by rising. He believed it to be a piece of hysterical folly, just as she did. But some instinct of chivalry in him responded to the call made upon him. He was going, not to save Kilmeny from an imaginary death, but to protect the girl that loved him from showing all the world where her heart was.

"I'll be back inside of an hour—just as soon as I can trace that pipe for you, Miss Dwight," he said.

"After all, Moya may be right," India added, to back her friend.

"It's just possible," Bleyer conceded.

CHAPTER XX

THE ACID TEST

JACK KILMENY opened his eyes to find himself in darkness utter and complete except for a pin-point of light gleaming from far above. His head was whirling and throbbing painfully. Something warm and moist dripped into his eyes, and when he put his hand up to investigate the cause he knew it must be blood from a wound.

Faintly the sound of voices and of harsh laughter drifted down to him. Presently this died away. The stillness was almost uncanny.

"Something laid me out, I reckon. Must have been a bad whack."

His finger found a ridge above the temple which had been plowed through the thick, curly hair.

"Looks as if a glancing bullet hit me. Golden luck it didn't finish the job."

He moved. A sharp pain shot through his lower right leg. Trying to rise, he slipped down at once from a badly sprained ankle. Every muscle in his body ached, as if he had been jarred by a hard fall.

"Better have a look around first," he told himself.

Groping in his pocket, he found a match-case and struck a light. What he saw made him shudder. From the ledge upon which he lay a gulf fell away, the bottom of which could only be guessed. His eyes, becoming accustomed to the darkness, made out that he was in some sort of shaft, thirty feet or more below the surface. Rotten from age, the timberings had slipped and become jammed. Upon some of these he was resting. The sprained ankle, by preventing him from moving, had saved him from plunging down the well.

He held out a silver dollar and dropped it. From the time the coin took to strike, Jack judged he was a hundred feet from the bottom.

The flare of a second match showed him a wall-ladder leading down, but unfortunately it did not extend above him, except in rotting fragments. What had happened he could guess. Supposing him to be dead, his enemies had dropped the body down this deserted shaft. Not for a moment did he doubt who they were. The voices above had been unmistakably Cornish, and even without that evidence he would have guessed Peale and his partner as the guilty ones.

Since he could not go up he went down, moving warily so as not to jar loose the timbers upon which he lay. Every rung of the ladder he tested with great care before he put his weight upon it. Each step of the journey down sent a throb of pain from the wricked ankle, even though he rested his weight on his hands while he lowered himself. From the last rung—it was by actual count the one hundred forty-third—he stepped to the ground.

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Another match showed him a drift running from the foot of the shaft. Along this he dragged himself slowly, uncertain of direction but determined to find out what possibility of escape his prison offered. For two hundred yards the tunnel led forward and brought him up sharply at an impasse. A cave-in blocked farther advance.

"Check," Jack grimly told himself aloud.

He knew now that his situation was a very serious one, for he had been flung alive into a grave that offered only a slight prospect of escape. He was without food, effectually cut off from the surface of the earth, and none but those who had assaulted him knew that he was buried.

THE alternatives that lay before him were plain. He might climb the ladder again to the timber-ledge and keep calling for help, or he might attempt to dig a way over the cave-in with his hands and his pocket-knife, trusting that the tunnel led to another shaft. The former was a chance pure and simple, and a slender one at that.

It was not likely that anybody would pass the mouth of a deserted shaft, far up in the hills, at this season of the year. But it was quite within the probabilities that the tunnel led to some of the workings of a live property. Many miles of underground drifts were connected by intercepting stopes of adjoining mines. If he could force a way through the cave-in, there might be safety beyond. To go moling into such a place without timbering would be a dangerous business, but the crisis was one that justified any risk.

He took stock of his assets. Fortunately he had bought at a lunch-counter a ham sandwich to stay his appetite during the night trip. This was still in his pocket, badly mashed but still edible. Five cigars were in the case he carried, and upon his person all told he found eleven matches.

A little trickle of water ran through the tunnel and gave assurance that he would not die of thirst. His pocket-knife was a serviceable one, and he had plenty of physical strength.

Jack decided that he would eat half of the sandwich next day and reserve the rest for the second one. His cigars were precious luxuries to be indulged in once every twenty-four hours, after he had knocked off work.

He attacked the cave-in with the cool energy that characterized him. Out of a piece of board he fashioned a kind of shovel with his knife. Bits of broken timbering lay at the foot of the shaft. These he dragged into the tunnel for fuel to feed a small fire which he built to give light for the work.

All through the night and till noon the following day he dug among the fallen rocks and dirt, clearing this débris away after he had loosened it with his bare hands.

The impact of the fall when he had been thrown down the shaft had jarred him greatly. With the slightest movement of the body his back and shoulders ached, sending shoots of pain in protest to his brain. The sprained ankle he had bound tightly in a wet handkerchief, but every time his weight rested on that leg he had to grit his teeth. But it was not in him to quit. He stuck to his job till he had done the shift set himself.

At noon he crawled back to the foot of the shaft. He was fagged to exhaustion. For half an hour he lay stretched on his back with every muscle relaxed.

Presently he cut from his coat the pocket that contained the sandwich and divided the mash of ham and bread into two parts. One of these he ate. The other he returned to the coat.

Favoring his wricked ankle as best he could, Jack climbed the wall-ladder to the ledge upon which he had found himself lying the previous night. Five minutes' examination of the walls showed him that there was no chance to reach the top of the shaft unaided. He tested the jammed timbers to make sure they were secure before he put his weight upon them. During the next six hours he called aloud every few minutes to attract the attention of any one who might chance to be passing near.

Toward evening he treated himself to his first cigar, making the most of the comfort that it gave him. When the stub grew short he held it on the small blade of his knife so as not to miss a puff. What was left he wrapped in a handkerchief for later use.

As the stars began to come out in the little patch of blue sky he could see just above his prison, Jack lowered himself again to the foot of the shaft. Here he lay down a second time and within five minutes had fallen into a deep sleep.

ABOUT midnight he awakened and was aware at once of a ravenous hunger. He was still resolute to win a way out, though the knowledge pressed on

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him that his chances were slender at the best. Till morning he worked without a moment's rest. The fever in his ankle and the pain of the sprain had increased, but he could not afford to pay any attention to them.

Blood from his scarred, torn hands ran down his wrists. Every muscle in his abused body ached. Still he stabbed with his knife into the earth that filled the tunnel, and still he pulled rocks back with his shovel. All his life he had fought for his own hand. He would not let himself believe fate had played so scurvy a trick as to lock him alive into a tomb closed so tightly that he could not pry a way out.

When his watch told him it was eight o'clock, he staggered to the shaft again and lay down on his back to rest. Before climbing to the platform above he finished the sandwich. He was very hungry and could have eaten enough for two men had he been given the opportunity. Again for hours he called every few minutes at the top of his voice.

In his vest-pocket were a pencil and a notebook used for keeping the accounts of the highgraders with whom he did business. To pass the time he set down the story of the crime which had brought him here, and his efforts to free himself.

After darkness fell he let himself down to the foot of the shaft and slept. Either from hunger or from the fever in his ankle he slept brokenly. He was conscious of a little delirium in his waking spells, but the coming of midnight found him master of himself though a trifle light-headed.

It was impossible to work as steadily as he had done during the two previous nights. Hunger and pain and toil were doing their best to wear out his strength. His limbs moved laggardly. Once he fell asleep in the midst of his labor. He dreamed of Moya, and after he awakened—as he presently did with a start—she seemed so near that it would scarce have surprised him if in the darkness his hands had come in contact with the soft flesh of her vivid face. Nor did it strike him as at all odd that it was Moya and not Joyce who was visiting him when he was in prison. More than once he clearly heard her whisper courage to him.

Next day the notes in his diary were more fragmentary.

Broke my rule and smoked two cigars today. Just finished my fourth. Leaves one more. I drink a great deal. It helps me to forget I'm hungry. Find a cigar goes farther if I smoke it in sections. I chew the stubs while I'm working.

Have tunneled in about seventeen feet. No sign that I'm near the end of the cave-in. There's a lot of hell in being buried alive.

Think I'm losing my voice from shouting so much when I'm in the shaft. Gave it up today and let little Moya call for me. She's a trump. Wish she'd stay here all the time and not keep coming and going.

The jottings on the fourth day showed the increase of the delirium. Sometimes his mind appeared to be quite clear, then it wandered to queer fancies.

Last cigar gone. Got sick from eating the stub. Violent retchings. Kept falling asleep while working. Twenty-nine feet done—surely reach the end tomorrow.

Another cave-in just after I crawled out from my tunnel. All my work wiped out. Moya, the little devil, laughed and said it served a highgrader right.

Have telegraphed for help. Can't manage alone. Couldn't make it up the shaft and had to give up the climb. Ordered a big breakfast at the Silver Dollar—steak and mushrooms and hot cakes. The telegraph wires run through pipe along floor of tunnel. Why don't the operator stay on his job? I tap my signals and get no answer.

He began to talk to himself in a rambling sort of way. Sometimes he would try to justify himself for highgrading in jerky, half-coherent phrases, sometimes he argued with Peale that he had better let him out. But even in his delirious condition he stuck to his work in the tunnel, though he was scarce able to drag himself about.

As the sickness grew on him, the light-headed intervals became more frequent. In one of these it occurred to him that he had struck high-grade ore and he filled his pockets with samples taken from the cave-in.

He spent a good deal of time explaining to Moya patiently over and over again that the business of highgrading was justified by the conditions under which the miners lived. There was no sequence to his thoughts. They came in flashes without logical connection. It became, for instance, a firm obsession that the pipe running through the tunnel was a telegraph wire by means of which he could communicate with the outside world, if the operator would only stay on duty. But his interest in the matter was intermittent.

It is suggestive of his condition that when Moya's answer came to his seven taps he took it quite as a matter of course.

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"The son of a greaser is back on the job at last," he said aloud without the least excitement. "Now I'll get that breakfast I ordered."

He crawled back to the foot of the shaft in a childish, absurd confidence that the food he craved would soon be sent down to him. While he waited, Jack fell into light sleep where he lost himself in fancies that voiced themselves in incoherent snatches of talk.

CHAPTER XXI

CAPTAIN KILMENY RETIRES

A VOICE calling his name from the top of the shaft brought Jack Kilmeny back to consciousness. He answered.

A shout of joy boomed down to him in Colter's heavy bass. He could hear too the sweet, troubled tones of a woman.

"Hurry, please, hurry. Thank God, we're in time!"

"Got that breakfast with you, little neighbor?" Jack called up weakly.

He did not need to be told that Moya Dwight was above, and since she was there of course she had brought him the breakfast that he had ordered from the Silver Dollar.

"Get back into the tunnel, Jack," Colter presently shouted.

"What for?"

"We're lowering some one to you. The timberings are rotten and they might fall on you. Get back."

"All right."

Five minutes later the rescuer reached the foot of the shaft. He stood for a moment with a miner's lamp lifted above his head and peered into the gloom.

"Where away, Jack?"

The man was Ned Kilmeny. He and Lord Farquhar had returned to the hotel just after dinner. The captain had insisted —all the more because there was some danger in it—that he should be the man lowered to the aid of his cousin.

"Bring that breakfast?" Jack snapped testily.

"Yes, old man. It's waiting up above. Brought some soup down with me."

"I ordered it two hours ago. What's been keeping you? I'm going to complain of the service."

The captain saw at once that Jack was light-headed and he humored him.

"Yes, I would. Now drink this soup."

The imprisoned man drained the bucket to the last drop.

Ned loosened the rope from his own body and fastened it about that of his cousin. He gave the signal and Jack was hauled very carefully to the surface, in such a way as not to collide with the jammed timbers near the top. Colter and Bleyer lifted the highgrader over the edge of the well, where he collapsed at once into the arms of his friends.

Moya, a flask in her hand, stooped over the sick man where he lay on the grass. Her fine face was full of poignant sympathy.

Kilmeny's mind was quite clear now. The man was gaunt as a famished wolf. Bitten deep into his face were the lines that showed how closely he had shaved death. But in his eye was the gay, inextinguishable gleam of the thoroughbred.

"Ain't I the quitter, Miss Dwight? Keeling over just like a sick baby."

The young woman choked over her answer.

"You mustn't talk yet — drink this, please."

He drank, and later he ate sparingly of the food she had hastily gathered from the dinner table and brought with her. In jerky little sentences he sketched his adventure, mingling fiction with fact as the fever grew on him again.

Bleyer, himself a game man, could not withhold his admiration after he had heard Captain Kilmeny's story of what he had found below. The two, with Moya, were riding behind the wagon in which the rescued man lay.

"Think of the pluck of the fellow—boring away at that cave-in when any minute a million tons of rock and dirt might tumble down and crush the life out of him! That's a big enough thing. But add to it his game leg and his wound and starvation on top of that. I'll give it to him for the gamest fellow that ever went down into a mine."

"That's not all," the captain added quietly. "He must have tunneled in about twenty-five feet when the roof caved again. Clean bowled out as he was, Jack tackled the job a second time."

MOYA could not think of what had taken place without a film coming over her eyes and a sob choking her throat. A vagabond and worse he might be, but Jack Kilmeny held her love beyond

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recall. It was useless to remind herself that he was unworthy. None the less she gloried in the splendid courage of the man. It flooded her veins joyously even while her heart was full to overflowing with tender pity for his sufferings.

Whatever else he might be, Jack Kilmeny was every inch a man. He had in him the dynamic spark that brought him smiling in his weakness from the presence of the tragedy that had almost engulfed him.

There was a little discussion between Colter and Captain Kilmeny as to which of them should take care of the invalid. The captain urged that he would get better care at the hotel where Lady Farquhar and India could look after him. Colter referred the matter to Jack.

"I'm not going to burden Lady Farquhar or India. Colter can look out for me," the sick man said.

"It's no trouble. India won't be satisfied unless you come to the hotel," Moya said in a low voice.

He looked at her, was about to decline, and changed his mind. The appeal in her eyes was too potent.

"I'm in the hands of my friends. Settle it any way you like, Miss Dwight. Do whatever you want with me, except put me back in that hell."

After a doctor had seen Jack and looked after his ankle, and after the trained nurse had arrived and taken charge of the sick-room, Captain Kilmeny made a report to Moya and his sister.

"He's gone to sleep already. The doctor says he'll probably be as well as ever in a week, thanks to you, Moya."

"Thanks to you, Ned," she amended.

"He sent to you this record of how he spent his time down there—said it might amuse you."

The captain looked straight at her as he spoke.

"I'll read it."

"Do. You'll find something on the last page that will interest you. Now I'm going to say good night. It's time little girls were in bed."

He kissed his sister and Moya, rather to the surprise of the latter, for Captain Kilmeny never insisted upon the rights of a lover. There was something on his face she did not quite understand. It was as if he were saying good-by instead of good night.

She understood it presently. Ned had written a note and pinned it to the last page of the little book. She read it twice, and then again in tears. It told her that the soldier had read truly the secret her anxiety had flaunted in the face of all her friends.

It's no go, dear girl. You've done your best, but you don't love me. You never will. Afraid there's no way left but for me to release you. So you're free again, little sweetheart. -

I know you won't misunderstand. Never in my life have I cared for you so much as I do tonight. But caring isn't enough. I've had my chance and couldn't win out. May you have good hunting wherever you go. NED.

Her betrothed had played the game like the gentleman he was to a losing finish. She knew he would not whimper or complain, that he would meet her tomorrow cheerfully and easily, hiding even from her the wound in his heart. He was a better man than his cousin. She could not deny to herself that his gallantry had a finer edge. His sense of right was better developed and his courage quite as steady.

Ned Kilmeny had won his V. C. before he was twenty-five. He had carried to a successful issue one of the most delicate diplomatic missions of recent years. Everybody conceded that he had a future. If Jack had never appeared on her horizon, she would have married Ned and been to him a loving wife. But the harum-scarum cousin had made this impossible.

Why? Why had her roving heart gone out to this attractive scamp who did not want her love or care for it? She did not know. The thing was as unexplainable as it was inescapable. All the training of her life had shaped her to other ends. Lady Farquhar would explain it as a glamour cast by a girl's foolish fancy. But Moya knew the tide of feeling which raced through her was born not of fancy but of the true romance.

CHAPTER XXII

TWO IN A BUCKET

JACK heard the story of his rescue from India. He surprised her alone in the breakfast-room by hobbling in one morning after the rest had gone.

She popped a question directly at him.

"Did the doctor say you could get up?"

"Didn't ask him," he answered with a

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laugh and dropped into a seat across the table.

Shaven and dressed in a clean, freshly pressed suit, he looked a different man from the haggard, grimy vagabond Captain Kilmeny had brought back with him three days earlier. The eyes were still rather sunken and the face a bit drawn, but otherwise he was his very competent and debonair self. His "good mornin', India," was as cheery and matter of fact as if those five days of horror had never existed.

"Don't believe it will hurt you." Her bright eyes were warm in their approval of him. "You look a lot fitter than you did even yesterday. It's awfully jolly to see you around again, Cousin Jack."

"I'm enjoying it myself," he conceded. "Anything of importance in that covered dish over there?"

"Tell me all about it," she ordered, handing him the bacon. Then with a shudder she added: "Must have been rather awful down there."

"Bad enough," he admitted lightly.

"Tell me." She leaned forward, chin in hand.

"What's the use? Those fellows put me down. Your brother took me up. That's all."

"It isn't all. Ned says it is perfectly marvelous the way you dug that tunnel and escaped from being crushed, and then dug it again after it had caved."

"Couldn't lie down and quit, could I? A man in the hole I was can't pick and choose." He smiled lazily at her and took a muffin from a plate handed him by the waiter. "My turn to ask questions. I want the full story of how you guessed I was in the west shaft of the Golden Nugget."

"Haven't you heard? It was Moya guessed it—from the tapping on the pipe, you know."

"So I've been told. Now let's have the particulars."

His eyes went arrow-straight into hers and rested there.

India told him. She knew that Ned would make a safer husband for Moya than this forceful adventurer. It was quite likely to be on the cards that he cared nothing for her friend. Indeed his desperate flirtation with Joyce indicated as much. Moreover, Moya would not marry a man whom she could not respect, one who made his living by dishonest practises. But in spite of all these objections Miss Kilmeny told her cousin how Moya had fought for his life against ridicule and unbelief regardless of what any of them might think of her.

He made one comment when she had finished.

"So I have to thank Moya Dwight for my life."

"Moya alone. They laughed at her, but she wouldn't give up. I never saw anybody so stubborn. There's something splendid in her. She didn't care what any of us thought. The one thing in her mind was that she was going to save you. So Mr. Bleyer had to get up from dinner and find out from the maps where that pipe went. He traced it to the old west shaft of the Golden Nugget."

"And what did you think?" he asked, watching her steadily.

"I admired her pluck tremendously."

"Did Verinder—and Bleyer—and Lady Farquhar?"

"How do I know what they thought?" flamed the girl. "If Mr. Verinder is cad enough——"

She stopped, recalling certain obligations she was under to that gentleman.

"Why did she do it?"

She flashed a look of feminine scorn at him.

"You'll have to ask Moya that if you want to know."

He nodded his head slowly.

"That's just what I'm going to do."

"You'll have more time to talk with her—now that Joyce is engaged and daren't flirt with you," his cousin suggested maliciously.

Though he tried to carry this off with a laugh, the color mounted to his face.

"I've been several kinds of an idiot in my time."

"Don't you dare try any nonsense with Moya," her friend cried a little fiercely.

"No," he agreed.

"She's not Joyce."

He had an answer for that.

"I'd marry her tomorrow if she'd take me."

"You mean you——?"

"Yes. From the first day I met her here. And I didn't know it till I was down in that hell-hole. Shall I tell you something?" He put his arms on the table and leaned toward her with shining eyes. "She was with me down there most of the time.

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Any time I stopped to listen I could hear her whisper courage in that low, sweet voice of hers."

"You know about her and Ned?"

"Yes."

"He's a better man than you are, Jack."

"Yes."

"But you won't let him have her."

"No, not unless she loves him."

"She would have loved him if it hadn't been for you."

"You mean she loves me?"

"She won't marry you. She can't."

"Why not? Because I don't belong to her social set?"

"No. That would be reason enough for Joyce or me, but I don't think it would stop Moya."

"You mean—highgrading?"

"Yes."

JOYCE interrupted further confidences by making her usual late appearance for breakfast. At sight of Kilmeny her eyes brightened. Life always became more interesting for her when a possible man was present. Instantly she came forward with a touch of reluctant eagerness that was very effective.

"I'm glad to see you up again—so glad, Mr. Kilmeny."

In the pretty breakfast-gown which displayed her soft curves and the ripe roundness of throat and arm she made a picture wholly charming. If Jack was overpowered, he gave no sign of it.

"Glad to meet you, Miss Seldon."

Her eyes rained sweet pity on him, a tenderness potent enough to disturb the serenity of any young man not in armor.

"We—we've been so worried about you."

He laughed genially and without resentment.

"Awfully good of you. Shall I ring for the waiter?"

India rose.

"I'm going riding with Ned and Moya," she explained.

Alone with the Westerner, Joyce felt her blood begin to quicken.

"Are you quite—recovered?" she asked.

Their eyes met. In his there was a faint cynical smile of amusement.

"Quite."

She understood the double meaning in his words. Her lashes fell to the soft cheeks, then lifted again.

"I thought perhaps there might be—that you might still be——"

He shook his head vigorously.

"It was only a dream. I can laugh at it now—and at myself for taking it seriously."

Joyce bit her lip with vexation. There was something not quite decent in so prompt a recovery from her charms. He did not appear to hold even any resentment.

Nor did he. Kilmeny had been brought too near the grim realities to hold any petty pique. He found this young woman still charming, but his admiration was tinctured with amusement. No longer did his imagination play upon her personality. He focused it upon the girl who had fought for his life against the ridicule and the suspicions of her friends. It was impossible for him to escape the allurement of her fine, sweet courage, so gallantly expressed in every look and motion.

But Moya let him severely alone. Her pride was suffering because she had showed to all her little world too keen an interest in him. In her anxiety to repudiate any claim he might think she felt she had upon him the girl was scornfully indifferent to his advances. Almost rudely she rejected his gratitude.

"The man does not owe me anything. Can't he see that honors are easy?" she said impatiently to Lady Farquhar.

Jack Kilmeny was no quitter. He set that lean jaw of his and would not accept repulse. In four days now the Farquhar party was going to leave Goldbanks, and he made the most of his time.

Moya never saw him coming toward her without having her pulses stirred, but her look always met his quietly and steadily. Not once did she give him a chance to see her alone. Even Lady Farquhar, who had been a severe critic of her vagaries, commended now her discretion. Jack rebelled against it in vain. He could not find a chance to speak. It was characteristic of him that he made one.

By shrewd maneuvering he arranged an expedition to the Silent Sam mine. The property itself was of no particular interest. The attractive feature was a descent in ore-buckets from the shaft-house, perched far up on the edge of a precipitous cliff, to the mill in the valley below. This was made by means of heavy cables to which the buckets were suspended. After Jack had explained how the men rode back and

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forth by this means across the valley between the mill and the mine, India was seized with the inspiration he had hoped for.

"Let's go down in the buckets, dear people."

Lady Farquhar protested and was overruled by a chorus of votes. The miner assured her that it was entirely safe. Reluctantly she gave permission for her flock to make the trip if they desired.

THEY rode on horseback to the mill. Jack paired with India, making no attempt to ride beside Moya, who brought up the rear with the captain. The Westerner, answering the questions of his cousin, was at his debonair best.

Occasionally there drifted back to the couple in the rear fragmentary snatches of his talk. He was telling of the time he had been a mule-skinner in New Mexico, of how he had ridden mail near Deming, and of frontier days at Tombstone. Casual anecdotes were sprinkled through his explanations to liven them. He spoke in the slurring drawl of the Southwest which went so well with the brown, lean face beneath the pinched-in felt hat and the well-packed vigor of the man.

"And what is 'bucking a sample'?" India wanted to know after one of his stories.

"You just pound some rock up and mix it to get a sample. Once when I was drag-driver of a herd in a round-up——"

Moya heard no more. She turned her attention resolutely to her companion and tried to detach her mind from the man in front. She might as well have tried to keep her heart from beating.

After they had arrived at the mill Jack quietly took charge of the disposition of the party. Verinder and Joyce were sent up in the first bucket. When this was half-way up to the mine the cable stopped to let another couple enter a bucket. Joyce, fifty feet up in the air, waved her hand to those below.

"You next, India," ordered her cousin.

The young woman stepped into the bucket.

"I'm afraid," she announced promptly.

"No need to be. Captain, your turn."

The eyes of the two men met. Ned Kilmeny guessed instantly that the other had arranged this so as to get a few minutes alone with Moya. He took a place beside his sister immediately.

The cable did not stop again until the second pair of passengers had reached the mine.

Moya, followed by Jack, stepped into the basket, which began to rise steadily as it moved across the valley.

Kilmeny did not lose a minute.

"Why don't you let me see you alone? Why do you run away from me?" he demanded.

Little patches of color burned beneath the shadows of her eyes. A sound as of a distant surf began to beat in her ears.

"What nonsense! Why should I run from you?" she asked, meeting with difficulty the attack of his masterful gaze.

"Because you're afraid to let me tell you that I love you," he charged.

"Thought it was Joyce you—fancied," she retorted quietly, her pulse hammering.

"So it was. I fancied her. I love you. I'm asking you to marry me."

"You don't have to ask me to marry you because you exaggerate the service I did you."

"I ask you because I love you."

"Thank you very much for the compliment. Sorry I must decline."

She did not dare look at him. Her eyes were fixed on the mill far below.

"Why must you—since you love me?"

The telltale pink stained her cheeks.

"You take that for granted, do you?"

"It's true, I believe. How can I make love to you as other men do? Lady Farquhar won't let me see you alone—even if you were willing to give me a chance. In two days you are going out of my life. I must speak the truth bluntly. I love you. It has been that way with me ever since you came into my life, little Moya. But I was blind and didn't see it till—till I was alone in the mine with death."

"I—am sorry."

"That is not enough. I'm going to have the truth. You saved my life. What for? It is yours—if you will take it."

She looked straight at him.

"I can't marry you."

"Why can't you? Can you say that you don't love me?"

Womanlike, she evaded the issue.

"The cable has stopped. What has happened?"

"Nothing has happened. It has stopped

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because I arranged with the engineer at the hoist to have it stop. When I give the signal it will start again."

"But——"

He brushed aside her futile protest.

"I'm going to have this out with you. Dare you tell me that you don't love me, Moya?"

He forced her to meet his eyes.

"Please—be generous. What will they think? Let us start," she begged.

"They will think something is wrong with the machinery. But it doesn't matter in the least what they think. It's my last chance, and I'll not give it up. You've got to answer me."

THE point where the bucket had stopped was a hundred feet above the ground below. She looked down, and shuddered.

"It's so far down—please."

"Then don't look down. Look at me, Moya. It won't take you a moment to answer me."

"I have. I said I couldn't marry you."

"Tell me that you don't love me and I'll give the signal."

"I—don't."

"Look straight at me and say it."

She tried to look at him and repeat it, but her eyes betrayed the secret she was fighting to keep from him. The long lashes fell to the hot cheeks an instant too late.

His hand found hers.

"My little Irish wild rose, all sweetness and thorns," he murmured.

Above the tumult of her heart she heard her voice say, as if it were that of a stranger—

"It's no use—I can't—marry you."

"Because I'm a highgrader?"

She nodded.

"Do you think I'm worse than other men? Down in the bottom of your heart, do you believe that?"

She smiled wanly.

"Other men are not—making love to me."

"Am I nothing but a thief to you?"

"I have told you that you are the man I love. Isn't that a good deal?"

The desire of her, pure as a flame, swept through him.

"It's the greatest thing that ever came into my life. Do you think I'm going to let it end there? I'm going to fight for our happiness. I'm going to beat down the things that come between us."

"You can't. It's too late," she cried wistfully.

"It's never too late for love so long as we're both alive."

"Not for love, but——"

"You've got to see this as I see it, sweetheart. I'm a man—primitive if you like. I've done wild and evil things—plenty of them. What of that? I slough them off and trample them down. The heart of me is clean, isn't it?"

"Yes."

To look at him was enough to clear away all doubt. He had the faults that go with full-blooded, elemental life, but at bottom this virile American was sound.

"Well! Isn't that enough?"

The little movement of her hands toward him seemed to beg for pity.

"Jack! I can't help it. Maybe I'm a little prig, but—mustn't we guide our lives by principle and not by impulse?"

"Do I guide mine by impulse?"

"Don't you?" She hurried on to contradict, or at least to modify, her reluctant charge. "Oh, I know you are a great influence here. You're known all over the State. Men follow you wherever you lead. Why should I criticize you—I, who have done nothing all my life but lean on others?"

"Go ahead. When I ask you to marry me I invite your criticism."

"I have to take little steps and to keep in well-worn paths. I can't make laws for myself as you do. Those that have been made may be wrong, but I must obey them."

"Why? Why should you? If they're wrong, fight against them."

"I can't argue with you—dear. But I know what I think right. I *want* to think as you do. Oh, you don't know how I long to throw my Puritan conscience overboard and just trust your judgment. I admire you tremendously. But I can't give in—I can't."

The muscles stood out on his lean cheeks as he set his teeth.

"You've got to, Moya! You're mine—the one woman in the world I want and am going to have."

She shook her head sadly.

"No—no!"

"Is it the money I have made highgrading? Is that what stands between us? If

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I were able to come to you without a dollar but with clean hands—would you marry me then?"

HE LEANED toward her, eager, ardent, passionate, the color in his cheeks burning to a dull brick tint beneath the tan.

"My dear—my dear, I'm only a girl—and I love you." Somehow her hands were buried in the strong grip of his. "But I can't live on the profits of what I think is wrong. If it weren't for that, Jack, I'd marry you if you were a pauper—and thank God for the chance."

"I'm not a pauper." He faced her doggedly. "I've fought for my share of the spoils. You've been brought up in a hothouse. Out in the world a man wins because he's strong. Do you think it's all been play with me? I've ridden night-herd in a blizzard when the temperature was below zero. I've done my shift on the twelfth level of the Never Quit many a month. Do you think I'm going to give up my stake now I've won it at last?"

She looked at him tremulously.

"I don't ask you to give it up. You'll have to decide that for yourself."

"Don't you see I can't give it up? If I do, I lose you. How can I take care of you without money?"

"I'd do my best, Jack."

"You don't understand. It would be for years—until I had made another start. I wouldn't let you give up everything unless I had something to offer. I wouldn't consider it."

"Isn't that putting pride before love, Jack? You know I have a little money of my own. We could live—in very decent poverty. I would love to feel that we were fighting—together. We both know you'll win in the end. Wouldn't it be fine to work out your success in partnership? Dear, I'd *rather* marry you while you're still a poor man."

For a moment the vision of it tempted him, but he put the dream away.

"No. It won't do. Of course I'm going to win out in the end, but it might take a dozen years to set me on Easy Street. For a woman brought up as you have been poverty is ——"

"Then you think I'm only a doll!" she flashed. "You want to put me back in that hothouse you mentioned. I'm just an ornament to dress up and look at and play with?"

"I think you're a little tinder-box," he said, smiling ruefully.

"Don't you see how it is with me, Jack? I've always craved life. I've wanted to take hold of it with both hands and without gloves. But they would never let me. I've got my chance now—if you really love me more than you do your pride and your money. I want to live close to the people—as you do."

"What did that suit cost you?" he asked abruptly.

"Don't remember. Twenty-five pounds maybe. Why?"

"One hundred twenty dollars, say. And you need dozens of dresses in a season. I'll make a guess that it takes five thousand a year to clothe you. That is nearly twice as much as I'll earn altogether next year, if I throw away my stake."

She waved his argument aside.

"Stupid boy! I have dresses enough to last me for five years—if you'll let me be that poor man's wife. I can make them over myself later and still be the best-dressed woman in camp."

From above came Captain Kilmeny's shout.

"We telephoned down. The engineer has the trouble arranged."

The cable began to move.

"When shall I see you alone again, Moya?" Jack demanded.

"I don't know."

"I'm going to see you. We've got to fight this out. I'll not let Lady Farquhar keep me from seeing you alone. It's serious business."

"Yes," she admitted. "I'll tell Lady Jim. But—there's no use in letting you think I'll give up. I can't."

"You've got to give up. That's all there is to it." His jaw was set like a vise.

The party above fell upon them as they landed.

"Were you frightened, Moya?" exclaimed Joyce above the chorus of questions.

"Just for a moment." Moya did not look at Jack. "Mr. Kilmeny told me it would be all right."

Jack's eyes danced.

"I told her we would work out of the difficulty if she would trust me."

Moya blushed. It happened that Captain

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Kilmeny was looking directly at her when his cousin spoke.

CHAPTER XXIII

HOMING HEARTS

JACK KILMENY had not been brought up in the dry sun-baked West for nothing. The winds of the Rockies had entered into his character as well as into his physique. He was a wilful man, with a good deal of granite in his make-up. A fighter from his youth, he did not find it easy to yield the point upon which he differed from Moya. There was in her so much of impulsive generosity that he had expected to overpower her scruples. But she stood like a rock planted in the soil.

It came to him as he walked home after a long fight with her that in his heart he did not want her to yield. She was the Moya Dwight he loved because she would not compromise with her conviction.

Yet, though he wanted her to stand firm, he hated the thought of giving way himself. It galled his pride that he must come to her without a penny, knowing that she had the means to keep them both modestly. Nor could he, without a pang, think of surrendering the twenty-eight thousand dollars he had fought for and won.

He was no visionary. The value of money he understood perfectly. It stood for power, place, honor, the things that were worth having. Given what he had, Jack knew he could double it in Goldbanks within the year. There were legitimate opportunities for investment that were bound to make rich returns. But without a dollar he would be like Samson shorn of his locks.

All through the night he was joined in battle with himself, but when at early dawn he stood on the top of Son-of-a-Gun Hill and faced a sky faintly pink with the warning of a coming sun his decision had been made.

On his way back he met Moya and Miss Seldon. Joyce pounced upon him with a grievance.

"You haven't told me yet how much you're going to give for the new hospital, Mr. Kilmeny. You know we're leaving tomorrow, and you'll have to decide at once. Be generous, please. You said yourself it was a good cause."

He nodded agreement.

"The most worthy charity I know. I've often wondered why some Andrew Carnegie didn't set the fashion of endowing hospitals by wholesale. They ought to be free to all poor folks out of health. When a man is losing his wages and his family is scrimping he ought not to be facing a thirty-dollar-a-week hospital charge. Yes, I'm for the new hospital, Miss Seldon."

"How strong are you for it?" Joyce asked, laughing at her newly acquired American slang. "Mr. Verinder has promised to give me two dollars for every one I can raise among my other friends. So don't be a—a——"

"A tightwad," supplied Moya with a smile. She could do a little in the native slang herself.

Jack went into his pocket for a checkbook and a fountain pen. He wrote for a few seconds, tore the check from the stub, and handed it to Joyce.

That young woman gasped.

"Why—you don't really mean—it's for twenty-eight thousand two hundred and fourteen dollars!" she cried.

"And seventeen cents. Please don't forget that," he added.

"But—what on earth do you mean?"

Jack was looking at Moya, and she at him with shining eyes in which joy swam.

"It's a little thank-offering, Miss Seldon."

"Because you were rescued from the mine, I suppose. Still——"

"Because I'm engaged to be married to the best woman in the world," he corrected.

JOYCE whirled upon Moya with instant divination.

"You little wretch, and you never told me!"

If Miss Dwight had not known it herself till this moment, she gave no sign to that effect.

"We're telling you now, dear," she explained.

"How long have you been engaged? Was it yesterday in the bucket?"

Jack laughed.

"Nothing so romantic. We've been engaged a little less than half a minute. You get the first chance to wish Moya joy on having won so great a catch. She's marrying a pauper, you know."

"I think we're very rich," differed his sweetheart shyly.

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Joyce looked from one to the other suspiciously.

"I haven't a notion what either of you mean, but I know I'm going to hang on to this check, Mr. Millionaire Pauper."

Imps of mischief sparkled in the highgrader's eyes.

"Don't forget that Verinder has to write one for twice as much."

Miss Seldon could not help laughing.

"I'll see to that. He's not a welcher, but —I wonder how he'll look when I tell him."

"You ought to tell him as soon as you can," Jack hinted boldly.

"Oh, ought I? Did you say you had been engaged less than a minute, Mr. Kilmeny? How much will you give me to go down now and tell him?"

"I've nothing left to give except my gratitude."

"You're the first man who ever was so ungallant as to tell me he would be grateful to have me leave him."

"I'm the first who ever proposed to another girl in your presence. The circumstance is unusual," he flung back gaily.

"I didn't hear you propose. All you did was to announce it," she replied saucily.

"That's true too," admitted Kilmeny. "Well, I'm going to propose now if it isn't too late. You may stay if you like."

"Thanks, no." Joyce kissed her friend. "I hope you'll be very happy, dear. I—I believe you will."

Moya choked on her words.

"I know I shall, Joy."

Miss Seldon looked at Jack with an expression in which embarrassment and audacity were blended.

"I've always rather liked your pauper," she confided aloud to Moya.

Her confidences had their limits. She omitted to mention what had just popped into her mind, that within the fortnight he had proposed to her too on the same spot.

Jack bowed with exaggerated deference when she shook hands with him. He was just now riding the seventh wave of happiness and felt friendly to the whole world.

"Thanks very much. You're a good scout, Joyce."

"Good gracious! What may that be? Some more of your American slang, I suppose." She broke away from persiflage to add seriously: "You're right about one thing, though. You've got the best girl in the world. Be good to her, Jack Kilmeny."

With that she turned and walked down the hill. The other two walked up.

"I'm so proud of you, Jack boy," whispered one of them.

He laughed happily.

"I'm proud of myself. I've done the best day's work I ever did for myself."

"You know what I mean, Jack. What other man would have thrown away a small fortune—all he had—just for me?"

"I can name one other," suggested Kilmeny.

"Ned! But he's a saint."

"And I'm a sinner," her lover replied blithely.

"You're the sinner I love, then."

THEY had reached a clump of firs. Without knowing how it happened she found herself in his arms. There were both tears and laughter in her eyes as her lips turned slowly to meet his.

A mist like a veil of old rose hung above the mountain-tops. Hand in hand they watched the rising sun pierce through it and flood the crotches of the hills with God's splendid canvases. It was a part of love's egoism that all this glory of the young day seemed an accompaniment to the song of joy that pulsed through them.

Later they came to earth and babbled the nonsense that is the highest wisdom of lovers. They built air-castles and lived in them, seeing life through a poetic ambient as a long Summer day in which they should ride and work and play together.

At last she remembered Lady Farquhar and began to laugh.

"We must go down and tell her at once, Jack."

He agreed.

"Yes, let's go back and have it out. If you like, you may go to your room and I'll tackle her alone."

"I'd rather go with you."

He delighted in her answer.

Farquhar was taking an early morning stroll arm in arm with Lady Jim when he caught sight of them.

"Look, Di!"

Both of the lovers knew how to walk. Lady Farquhar, watching them, thought she had never seen as fine a pair of untamed human beings. In his step was the fine free swing of the hillman, and the young woman breasted the slope lightly as a fawn.

The Englishman chuckled.

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"You're beaten, Di. The highwayman wins."

"Nonsense," she retorted sharply, but with anxiety manifest in her frown.

"Fact, just the same. He's coming to tell us he means to take our little girl to his robber-den."

"I believe you'd actually let him," she said scornfully.

"Even you can't stop him. It's written in the books. Not sure I'd interfere if I could. For a middle-aged Pharisee with the gout I'm incurably romantic. It's the child's one great chance for happiness. But I wish to the deuce he wasn't a highgrader."

"She sha'n't sacrifice herself if I can prevent it," Lady Farquhar insisted stanchly with an emphatic nod.

"I 'member a girl who sacrificed herself for a line lieutenant without a shilling to call his own," he soliloquized aloud. "Would have him, and did, by Jove! Three deaths made him Lord Farquhar later, but it was the penniless subaltern she married."

"I've always been glad I did." She squeezed his arm fondly. "But this is different, James."

Kilmeny and Moya stopped. The young man doffed his gray felt hat and bowed.

"Mornin', Lady Farquhar—Lord Farquhar! We've come to ask your permission for our marriage."

"Mornin', rebels. Fancy I'll have to refuse it," cut back Farquhar, eyes twinkling, for this bold directness pleased and amused him.

"That would distress us extremely," answered Kilmeny with a genial smile.

"But would not affect your plans, I understand you to mean."

"You catch the idea exactly, sir."

Lady Farquhar entered the conversation.

"Are you planning to go to prison with him, Moya, when he is convicted of highgrading?" she asked pleasantly.

Moya told in three sentences of what her lover had done. The Englishman wrung Kilmeny's hand cordially.

"By Jove, you reform thoroughly when you go about it! Don't think I'd have enjoyed writing that check for Miss Joyce. Leaves you strapped, does it?"

"Dead broke," came the very cheerful reply.

"But of course Moya has some money," said Lady Farquhar quietly.

The Westerner winced.

"Wish she hadn't. It's the only thing I have to forgive her."

Farquhar lifted his eyebrows.

"Di!" he remonstrated.

His wife came to time with a frank apology.

"That was downright nasty of me, Mr. Kilmeny. I withdraw it. None the less I think Moya would be throwing herself away. Do you realize what you are proposing? She's been used to the best ever since she was born. Have you the means to supply her needs? Or are you considering a Phyllida and Corydon idyll in a cottage?"

"It will have to be something of that sort at first. I've told her all this too, Lady Farquhar."

"What does that matter if we love each other?" Moya asked.

"You'll find it matters a good deal," said Lady Jim dryly. "When poverty comes in, love is likely to wink out any day. Of course I realize that yours is of a quality quite unusual. It always is, my dear. Every lover has thought that since time began."

"We'll have to take our fighting chance of that," Jack replied.

Moya, her eyes shining, nodded agreement. No great gain can be won without risk. She knew there was a chance that she might not find happiness in her love. But where it called her she must follow—to a larger life certainly, to joy and to sorrow, to the fuller experiences that must come to every woman who fulfils her destiny.

A voice hailed Jack. Colter was hurrying up the street plainly excited. Kilmeny moved a few steps toward him.

Lady Jim took advantage of his absence to attack Moya from another angle.

"My dear, I wish I could show you how much depends on a similarity of tastes, of habits, of standards. Matrimony means more than love. It means adjustment."

"I've thought of that, too. But—when you love enough doesn't that help the adjustment?" asked the girl naively.

She had appealed to Farquhar. That gentleman came to her assistance.

"It does."

"This isn't a matter to be decided merely by personal preference," urged the older woman. "There may be—consequences."

The color beat into the face of the young

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woman in a wave, but her eyes held steadily to those of Lady Farquhar.

"I—hope so."

"Bravo, Moya!" applauded her guardian, clapping his hands softly.

"Don't you think they—the consequences—deserve a better chance than you are going to give them?"

"I'll answer that, Di," spoke up Farquhar. "When a girl chooses for the father of her children a man who is clean and strong and virile, and on top of that her lover, she is giving them the best possible chance in life."

Moya's gratitude shone through the eyes that met those of her guardian.

KILMENY swung back to the group he had left.

"I've good news, friends. This is my lucky day. You remember that when I was rescued from the Golden Nugget my pockets were full of ore samples I had picked up as I was tunneling."

"Yes—picked them up while you were delirious, didn't you?" Farquhar replied.

"Must have, I reckon. Well, you know how miners are always having pieces of quartz assayed. Colter took these to the man we employ. He's just learned that it is high-grade stuff."

"You've made a strike?"

"Looks like it. Colter wasn't taking any chances, anyhow. He hiked right around to the owners of the mine and signed up a five-year lease in his name and mine."

Farquhar shook hands with him cordially.

"Hope you make a fortune, Kilmeny."

Moya's chaperon, facing the inevitable, capitulated as gracefully as she could. After all the girl might have done worse. The man she had chosen was well born, good-looking, forceful, and a leader in his community. If this fortunate strike was going to leave him well off, clearly she must make the best of him.

"You're a lucky man. I hope you know you don't deserve a girl like Moya," she told him as she shook hands.

"I know it, all right. Can you tell me who does?" he flung back, with a gay insouciant smile.

At that moment Ned Kilmeny stepped out upon the hotel porch. Lady Jim nodded toward him.

"Perhaps," his cousin conceded. "But in this little old world a man doesn't get what he deserves."

"I see he doesn't. Ned is a better man than you."

"Yes," he admitted.

Captain Kilmeny, coming down the porch steps, saw in a flash what had happened. He came forward with the even stride and impassive face that seldom deserted him. In two sentences Lady Farquhar told him the facts.

"You lucky dog," he said to his cousin as their hands gripped.

Jack had never liked him better than in this moment when he was giving up so cheerfully the thing he wanted most in the world.

"It isn't always the best man that wins, Captain. I take off my hat to the better men who have tried and failed. Perhaps it may be a comfort to them to know that I'm the man that needs her most."

The captain turned to Moya.

"So you've found that good hunting already," he said to her in a low voice.

"Yes, I think I have—I'm sure of it, Ned." Her eyes were full of tender sympathy for him. She wished she could tell him how much she admired his fine spirit.

"God keep you happy," he said wistfully.

Jack joined them and slipped Moya's arm into his.

"Amen to that, Captain. And since Jack Kilmeny has been appointed deputy on the job I'm going to see your wish comes true."

Moya looked at her lover and smiled. She felt that her trust was founded upon a rock.

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HUNTED

By

Carrington Boykin

IN THE grayest dawn, while New York still slumbered under a chilly shroud of mist, Corwin confessed. For two days and nights he had been cooped up in one of the cramped cells in the bowels of Police Headquarters where confessions are wrung from suspects as one removes obstreperous teeth.

Corwin had held his own doggedly. Through a relentless twelve-hour inquisition he sat silent, undaunted, and indifferent as a punching-bag to all the cuffing and prodding incident to his silence. At the end of this time his water-supply was cut off—he could have gulped a gallon with ease now; sleep, too, had been forbidden him—his eyelids weighed a ton apiece, and every time they dropped from sheer exhaustion a detective shook him until he opened them.

Cassidy promised him a keg of cold water and a week's sleep if he made a clean breast of things, but Corwin merely shrugged his shoulders and propped his tired eyes open with two dirty fingers. Then Cassidy held out the bait he had purposely saved until this moment, a pinch of white powder, just enough for one sniff. Corwin would have scorned a handful of scintillating diamonds had Cassidy offered them, but the white powder, never.

He had once loved the stuff and it set him mad now, knowing as he did that it contained the blessed forgetfulness he craved. He wavered at the mention of the powder, so Cassidy, detective and inveterate strategist, shrewdly boosted his bid a generous pinch, even agreeing to chuck in the water and sleep for good measure.

A rare bargain, thought Corwin wearily. The three things he most desired he might have if he would only sign a paper stating that he had murdered Minnie Schwartz.

Then Cassidy produced a round pill-box brimming with white powder. The sight was enough. Corwin sold out unconditionally, and Cassidy, chuckling over his success, went for a stenographer and some one to witness the confession.

Cassidy helped the prisoner confess. He was the Department's specialist in this line of work, understanding just what legal kinks to avoid in drawing up such a document, it being his business to smooth matters over so that Corwin could coast without a hitch to the chair. Corwin told a ghastly tale, quickly, without a tremor, as if he were glad to unload himself of such grisly luggage.

When it was finished the stenographer read it aloud, making a few corrections suggested by Cassidy, and after Corwin had signed it with a shaky hand, the stenographer lumbered back upstairs followed by the sleepy detective whom Cassidy had impressed as a witness.

Five minutes later Corwin was free—he had formulated, resolved upon, and made his getaway, all within two tense minutes. Somehow the patent spring-bolt on the door failed to catch properly when Cassidy with the box of white powder in his pocket left the cage and hurried to the Detective Bureau for a tin-pail.

Water, dope, sleep, were the payments by which he intended to settle his debt to the prisoner. In a jiffy Corwin became wide awake as the undreamed-of possibility of escape flashed through his mind; he had interpreted the slam of the heavy door, he knew there should have been a sharp metallic click as the bolt shot home.

There was no time for deliberation if he were to place two or three minutes measured in city blocks between himself and the detective! He remembered so perfectly the side entrance through which Cassidy had ushered him into the building that he could have found it blindfolded.

His shoes came off as by magic. At his push the cell door opened silently as if its

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hinges were frictionless, and, bending low, he glided out of the cage, darting his eyes down the dimly lit corridor ahead of him.

Pausing for one second, he strained his vision into the obscurity. What if Cassidy had tricked him and was waiting in the shadows to ambush him as he passed? The thought well nigh dragged him back into the cell.

It was a perilous, nerve-racking pilgrimage through the shadowy, soundless corridors of Headquarters from his cell to the street, for each moment he expected a bullet to burrow into his brain. His footfalls were softer than a ghost's. Yet, during that seemingly interminable journey he agonized until the perspiration rolled from every pore; the faintest sound was intensified a thousand times in his ears; his very breath came and went with terrifying roars; and the still air seemed to catch the quickened throbs of his heart and magnify them to thuds that echoed ominously through the whole building.

The atmosphere seemed to have suddenly changed into a solid transparent substance through which he had to claw his way as with catlike steps he stole along in his stockinged feet. He reached the side door, panting, and, with tingling, trembling fingers, opened it softly and shot out into the early morning.

DAYLIGHT was struggling hard to penetrate the heavy fog that had blown in from the ocean during the night, and that now hung in dense banks in the streets. Standing on the curb, Corwin blinked like a man rudely awakened from a long, deep sleep—the suddenness of his escape almost bewildered him. He could barely distinguish objects five feet away. Even the somber pile of Headquarters, that towered beside him like a mausoleum, was a bulky blur. A single light glimmered feebly in the window of the Detective Bureau—Cassidy was there, he thought, or in the basement peering disconsolately into the empty cell.

Corwin appraised matters swiftly. He was a fugitive from a signed confession to murder. He had not a moment to lose in getting to cover. He had no ambitions to play peep-peep with the police. His idea was to vanish as completely as if the earth had conveniently yawned and swallowed him up, and he knew that New York abounded in nooks where a man, even a murderer, might fade into nothingness so far as the efforts of the police to locate him were concerned.

The East Side, where the murder occurred, was out of the question; for Cassidy like all baffled sleuths would hasten to the scene of the crime as soon as he discovered that his bird had flown. The West Side, however, offered boundless security amid its labyrinth of narrow, crooked streets, and also chances of getting to Jersey before the police drag-net was drawn too tightly.

Shivering, he scuttled through the fog diagonally across the slimy street and hurried along toward Broome Street, hugging the buildings. After two days of warm, stuffy air in the basement of Headquarters, the clammy mist set his teeth chattering.

He glanced behind furtively and experienced some slight relief on finding the light in the Detective Bureau obscured.

At the corner he turned west and quickened his gait along the sidewalk, walking near the curbing, at the same time keeping a sharp lookout for patrolmen who might be loitering in darkened doorways. He knew that the sight of a bareheaded man hurrying through the street at this hour in his stockinged feet, with his hands crammed into his pockets and his face half-hidden in his turned-up coat collar, was enough to cause the sleepiest, most incurious copper to investigate.

His imagination began to work feverishly as he hastened along. The buildings mantled by the grayish fog assumed fantastic outlines as of monsters in readiness to pounce upon him; and each dangling arc-light he passed loomed up in the mist like a giant patrolman, juggling a huge night-stick with glowing tip.

Momentarily he expected to hear Cassidy's heavy feet pounding the pavements in pursuit. He realized that he would be a poor match for Cassidy, but if the detective ran him to bay he meant to grapple and give battle like a demon, and if he could get a certain three-fingered grip on Cassidy's throat he would win.

Twice he started violently. Once a cat whisked in front of him in the mist with a yowl that chilled his blood; and a stray dog that brushed against his leg made his flesh creep with horror.

Corwin was well aware that the odds were dead against him in his flight, but without

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batting an eyelid he could take chances that would appall the ordinary mortal. His start in life had been above the average, but he was ill-starred, and his repeated reverses had gradually let him down in the world until at last he became entangled with the police.

In build there was nothing about him to identify him a second time to the casual observer, save that he was very compact. It was his eyes that unfailingly branded who he was; they were his curse, by which a stranger could pick him out from ten thousand men.

The year before he had been tried for shooting down a man during a piratical incursion on a Sixth Avenue diamond shop, all because a passerby swore that the man who opened fire from the flying taxi had remarkable pop-eyes.

It was Cassidy who tried to fasten the crime on Corwin. But a flimsy alibi, a shyster lawyer from Essex Market, and a scarcity of corroborative evidence combined to rescue him from this ticklish and unwarranted predicament. However, this incident served firmly to establish his reputation in police circles; his pictures had been placarded in every police-station in the Greater City, and after his arrest the Identification Bureau at Headquarters catalogued his finger-prints and physiognomy.

The policemen in at least ten of the downtown precincts were almost as familiar with his face as with their Commissioner's, and of late he was often collared on no provocation at all. Were he buttonholed on the same grounds now and taken to a station-house, the alarm for his immediate arrest would no doubt be abroad and he would be gleefully hustled back to the sweat-box at Headquarters.

The crime to which Corwin had confessed was a brutal, revolting affair, and New York, agasp, held up its hands in horror. The newspapers were embellishing their front pages with black and red scareheads concerning this latest trunk-murder mystery which bade fair to become the liveliest story since the *Titanic*, and as usual were decrying the gross laxity of the police which permitted such an atrocity to be perpetrated with apparent ease.

A young girl's body, mutilated almost beyond recognition, was found by the harbor patrol in a trunk washed up under one of the East River wharves. Brought to Headquarters, the body was identified as that of Minnie Schwartz, and the crime was traced to a tenantless house in Madison Street.

Five minutes after the finding of the body the Police Commissioner detailed fifty sleuths to beat about the city for the murderer, and six hours later Cassidy escorted Corwin to Headquarters. Somehow Cassidy had learned that Corwin had been seen with the girl prior to her disappearance. The arrest was withheld from a score of impatient reporters because the Commissioner meant to spring a surprise by producing the murderer and his confession simultaneously, and assigned Cassidy to break Corwin down.

GOADED by the thought of the inevitable result of his recognition by a policeman, Corwin now broke into a slow trot which he kept up until, stubbing his toe against a cold cobblestone, he barely repressed a yelp of pain. Just as he reached the corner of Broadway he made out the burly figure of a peg-post policeman, standing under the arc-light in the middle of the misty street.

Corwin checked his impetus as if he had met a stone wall, froze to the curbing for a brief space, and then fearfully shrank back into the billowing mist. Panic-stricken, he made a detour, crossing Broadway a block below, and began to sprint.

Some distance further on he passed under the elevated structure just as a northbound train rumbled overhead. Realizing that the whine of the train would drown the plunk of Cassidy's feet on the sidewalk, he glanced timidly over his shoulder a number of times before the harsh noise finally died away.

The street seemed to have no end. Already his legs felt as if they had covered miles; and while he was wondering whether he would ever reach the section of the city he sought, the idea obsessed him that before he took many more steps a heavy hand would push through the mist and seize him from behind.

He ran faster. It entered his mind that hunted animals must have the same doomed feeling as his.

At the next corner he stubbed the same toe a second time, missed his footing, and sprawled on the slippery sidewalk where he lay gasping until he struggled painfully to

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his feet. A moment later he heard the measured pit-pat of some one approaching, and he had just time enough to crouch tremblingly in the sloppy gutter before a policeman stalked by in the mist, so close that Corwin could have put out his hand and touched the officer's leg.

He dared not move or breathe until the patrolman had cleared the corner, and then he bolted off again in terror. About this time he noticed that his toe was bleeding in earnest, leaving a little red blotch every few steps, and the thought struck him that Cassidy might possibly pick up the faint red trail and run him to earth.

So fearful did he become of this that he stopped and knotted a dirty handkerchief around the toe. His feet were like pieces of ice. At the same time he wondered if his stockinged feet left tracks that Cassidy could follow on the wet sidewalk. The barest possibilities shaped themselves into absolute certainties.

The terrific strain began to tell on him; he had pent up his tumultuous emotions until he felt like shrieking, clapping his hands together, doing anything to relieve the torturing tension within him. He smothered half a dozen screams. His finger-nails bit at the palms of his hands, and he drew his under lip between his teeth and gnawed it raw.

The thirty-six hours without nourishment, without sleep, and under high pressure, together with the gruelling pace he had set for ten long minutes, had sapped his strength, and only a surprising store of reserve energy plus the utter panic induced by his physical exhaustion now drove his jaded body ahead.

The early morning grayness was shot with streaks of broad daylight, and the fog-drifts that cluttered the streets were dispersing before a light west wind. Corwin became hysterical. The impulse to scream broke from his control and oozed out in spasmodic whimpers like those of a child that has cried for a long while.

Cassidy's footsteps seemed to ring like the notes of a knell in his ears, and each moment he felt Cassidy's heavy hand on his shoulder. Once he turned, snarling, showing his teeth like a beast at bay, his fists clenched. But he saw only the mist swirling in his wake and he laughed at himself.

He thought of his eyes, those bulging, telltale things that fate had condemned him to carry wherever he went, and he mumbled an incoherent piece of profanity at them. Nausea added its sickening pangs to his suffering; the hard run on the empty stomach had done this.

At last, delirious and staggering blindly, he tottered under a long shed where he braced himself against the rickety door of a market, long ago abandoned to rats and decay. With what few sparks of energy and self-possession still lived in him, he pushed in one of the rotting lower panels and laboriously crawled inside, where sleep soon deadened his anguish.

THE fugitive awoke with a groan and a thirst that made him think there was a fire in his throat. He lay on his back in pitch darkness under a pile of warm, smelly canvas that had been used to cover green-goods in days gone by.

When he tried to move he found that his muscles and joints had stiffened during his sleep, and he had to straighten out each limb separately and repeatedly with excruciating slowness, the process of unlimbering his entire body occupying some minutes. He wiggled his injured toe and it responded by aching furiously.

With much exertion he got to his feet. He stood without quivering; his nervousness was gone. Night had come again while he slumbered and he now noticed that a ribbon of crystal from an arc-light outside streamed through one of the shutterless windows. Avoiding the gleam he carefully groped his way to the rear of the building, amid the scampering of innumerable rats.

He smelled water like a camel scents an oasis, and in the back yard he stumbled against a brimming rain-barrel. In a jiffy he had buried his face in the water, gulping it down, hugging the sides of the barrel as if he had discovered a vat containing the elixir of life. Had it been cold raw poison, he would have drank as eagerly, for he had reached that stage of physical anguish where he would have slaked his hot thirst with any liquid, provided that it was cold. With each gulp he felt his strength recruiting, and when he crept back into the black market he had taken a new lease on life.

With his partial rehabilitation he began to brood over his desperate plight. Every policeman in New York City—ten thousand

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of them, and some five hundred detectives, to deal roughly in figures—was hankering for a sight of him, because his capture meant prompt promotion for whomever effected it.

It was a depressing outlook. His chances of escaping from the city were infinitesimally small, with every exit under untiring, incessant surveillance.

He gloomily recalled the case of a daring thief who looted a Fifth Avenue jewelry-shop and after his arrest gave Headquarters the slip with bullets zipping past his ears, only to be tagged the next day as he was boarding a train for the West. Corwin was famished for food, yet he feared going in search of it, feeling that every inhabitant of the Greater City carried a mental picture of him and his eyes. If only he could painlessly pluck his eyes out and rid himself of their maddening deformity.

He studied his predicament from every angle, finally arriving at the crushing conclusion that his capture was inevitable. But Corwin was not the kind to surrender without a struggle, and he welcomed the single cheerless gleam of hope he was able to conjure in his dire extremity, that of staving off his apprehension until starvation either took his life or whipped him from cover.

He dared not remain in the market. As soon as the police recovered their equilibrium they would begin to ferret through just such places as the one that now sheltered him, running their grasping tentacles into all of these places with one exception, the house where the murder was committed, which no doubt they had already ransacked to their satisfaction. In this house Corwin determined to secrete himself, to circle back, and he knew that only by infinite painstaking was his daring plan feasible.

Corwin understood police methods. He felt to a certainty that Cassidy was now patiently waiting outside the vacant house against the possibility that the murderer might resort to the old ruse of doubling back when he found the long arms of the police closing about him.

It was not a matter of guesswork. Corwin just knew Cassidy was there—an inexplicable something whispered it in his ear. He knew that he had outwitted the crafty detective on one occasion and he was confident of his ability to repeat the performance by sneaking into the house unobserved, even though Cassidy and a dozen policemen were on guard.

He had slipped through police cordons before; he could do it again. Moreover, the police might relax their zeal in other quarters, and, if he could hold out until then, he might yet make a clean getaway. He needed nerve for his mission and he felt that he had it.

In his pondering he thought of all the uncanny forces, old as crime itself, that prey upon a man fleeing his accusers. During his stay in the Tombs awaiting trial for his suspected share in the taxi affair, Corwin had dabbled in a treatise of the curious phenomena of the mind of the refugee; it was far too complex for him but he read it through thoughtfully and absorbed what little of it he was able to understand. He remembered reading that fugitives often carefully thought out avenues of escape that inevitably led to capture, and he wondered whether he was on any such deceptive track.

He mapped out his itinerary in detail, fixing in his mind three unfrequented routes, calculating that at least four hours would be required for his journey. He felt reasonably certain that the night was still young.

IT TOOK him over three hours to run the long perilous gantlet between his refuge and the house in Madison Street. He emerged from the ramshackle market like a rat, coming out cautiously, head first, reconnoitering in all directions before he wormed the rest of his body through the broken panel.

At the same time he oriented himself by means of a stupenduous electric display atop one of the coastwise steamship piers that told in blazing words of the balmy joys of the tropics. It made him sigh inwardly. He longed to be lazying in the sunshine a thousand miles from New York. Again his bared head and stockinged feet became paramount factors. He might be corralled as an escaped lunatic.

He made the water-front without meeting a soul, and veered toward the Battery. The street was practically deserted save for occasional groups of boisterous longshoremen loitering in front of the cheap saloons that dot the water-front, who bestowed no attention on his slinking figure.

He slouched along slowly, limping, extremely desirous of being counted as one

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of the numberless human derelicts that drift aimlessly up and down the long lane of steamship piers and grog-shops where mammoth schooners of frothing beer are served for almost a song.

Three times he had to reckon with policemen. Once he countermarched a block, and a second time, as a patrolman rounded a corner unexpectedly, Corwin quickly and calmly bent down and pretended to search the gutter for a cigar-butt. The third time he ducked hurriedly through a side entrance of a saloon to avoid a patrolman who was leaning against a shadowy doorway a few feet ahead. It was risky business, but he dared not pass the officer at such close range.

He intruded a dingy, ill-lighted rear room, furnished with a set of greasy chairs and tables, and devoid of customers. He entered so quietly that the barkeep, who was attending to the thirsty needs of his carousing patrons at the bar in the front room, was none the wiser. So Corwin slumped down easily into a chair near the door.

An evening paper lay outspread on the table before him and it was his own likeness, his own bulging eyes, and his full name in bold red type that immediately caught his eye. He bent down eagerly, hungrily, and without touching the paper commenced to read.

Not a detail was omitted—his capture, his marvelous escape, his confession word for word, and the city-wide search instituted for his recapture, were all related with scrupulous and picturesque exactitude. The entire blame was laid at Cassidy's door.

It was all so peculiarly ludicrous that a faint smile crawled across his drawn lips. He skimmed through two columns of news woven about him, but nowhere could he find mention of what steps Cassidy was personally taking to recover his prisoner. It puffed him up a trifle to think that the papers were making so extensive an ado over him—the most sought-after individual in New York, he told himself with a painful pretense at humor.

Absorbed in the paper he forgot his imminent danger until he was startled by hearing his own name spoken by some one near at hand. He cocked his ears and listened. The barkeep was discussing Corwin's escape with two of his noisy customers.

"Just walked out on 'em, Jim," remarked the barkeep with the knowingness of his ilk. "The papers say Cassidy forgot to lock the door after he pulled the confession out of him; left him for a minute, and when he got back the coop was empty. Forgot to take his hat and shoes—didn't have time, I guess. They're a bunch of boobs, those detectives. The Inspector says there was somebody on the outside waiting to help him. That Corwin's got nerve all right. Headquarters ain't no place to be dodgin' 'round corners and suchlike.

"They'll nab this guy by mornin', take it from me," he continued. "He didn't have time to skip town. The bulls are ten deep at all the ferry-houses and railroads; he can't get away. Murphy, the cop, just came in and said that orders was out from the Commissioner to go through all the old markets and warehouses 'round here. All the coppers know this guy. Why, man, he's got eyes that are poppin' out of his head. Wait till you see his picture—it's in the paper in the back room."

Corwin heard every word distinctly. He shut his eyes involuntarily as if some one had struck him in the face, then half-opened them furtively, and with hardly a sound stole from the room.

An hour later he skulked through Battery Park. A brisk wind, laden with dampness, made him shiver a little. So he paused in the shadow of the Aquarium and put himself through a vigorous three-minute exercise which accelerated his blood enough to produce a comfortable glow all over his body. The night was very clear and starry, and from out over the bay came an occasional hoarse blast of tug or ferry.

Not far off shore a belated tramp steamer was putting to sea, a great black hull that slashed and churned the waters, and Corwin yearned to be aboard her. About midnight he sat down under Brooklyn Bridge and massaged his sore, aching feet. He noticed that the bottoms of his socks were worn to threads and he would have discarded the uppers had he not been fearful that the whiteness of his feet would attract an unwelcome, hostile eye.

After what seemed centuries of patient maneuvering, he finally sneaked on all fours into the blackness of the narrow alley that ran through a block of old brick houses, erected before tenements became the approved style of dwelling on the lower East Side.

Crawling along stealthily, he at last

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paused in the rear of the house where the murder occurred. He felt at home—the only half-way agreeable sensation he had experienced in forty-eight hours—for he was familiar with every foot of ground in the neighborhood, having been born not many doors away; and he wondered at the hard fate that had led him back to the haunts of his boyhood with a confession of murder clinging to him.

The sharp cinders in the alley stabbed his feet like knives. Stooping over he gently patted about the ground with the palms of his hands until he had gathered a number of small, round cinders. Then, standing upright, he placed a cinder between the thumb and index finger of his right hand as he would a marble, and shot it into the blackness in the direction of the back door, pricking his ears to intercept whatever sound followed the hollow rattle of the cinder.

He repeated this at intervals until his cinders were exhausted, but not even a ghost of a guarded whisper answered his aerial feelers. The house was not picketed in the rear as was customary in such cases—more of Cassidy's cunning, leaving this avenue open so that the murderer could seek haven unmolested, a sort of spider-and-fly affair. Perhaps Cassidy and his sentinels were inside.

Corwin hit upon the attic as the place to hide himself—there was less chance of the police searching it again, and there were the roofs in case of hasty flight. He felt perfectly able to pass by his foes unseen; he could see as far as they in the darkness, probably farther, for no doubt sleep was oppressing them in that black inertia. He could move quietly, too, for he was the embodiment of sleepless, noiseless energy.

Ten sluggish minutes crept by while he traversed the ten feet between the alley and the back door—a step a minute, firmly planting one foot before he brought the other to life, testing his footing with the tender bottoms of his feet, making sure there were no cinders to crush and crunch as he put his weight on them. His aural nerves were tuned to catch inappreciable sounds. The fall of a snowflake could hardly have escaped them.

The incessant din of the city had subsided to a faint, faint roar like a mighty cataract heard at a great distance. He could even hear his own suppressed breathings. Each moment he expected Cassidy to pot-shot him from the dark shuttered window he discerned dimly above the back door.

The door stood open, yawning at him like the womb of night, exhaling into his face a dead, musty coldness like the interior of an ancient vault.

He had never encountered such murk; he seemed to have run against a wall of frozen ink that blocked his progress. Here, at least, was one kind of safety—obscurity.

He paused at the finish of his tenth step, his body poised, every sense abnormally alert, his pop-eyes peering vainly into the solid blackness ahead of him. He tried to steel himself for whatever circumstances might dictate, to inoculate himself with a supreme disregard for consequences. Cassidy was somewhere in that thick murk, of this Corwin was as positive as of his own existence; for all he knew Cassidy might even at this moment have a bead on him, his life might be a matter of seconds.

His nerves which had stood the hazardous trip across the city without a quiver now began to harass him, and a few wavelets of dismay rippled through him in rapid succession. A single silent step placed him in the doorway and his feet tingled as they flattened on the cold wooden threshold.

He listened acutely before he budged again and fancied that he could hear the collisions of minute particles in the air—nothing else, utter silence and impenetrability. A tiny splinter rasped on the tough skin of his left foot, and for the instant every muscle on his frame tensed as if he had been suddenly petrified. He felt the fleet involuntary tightening-up of his muscles. They seemed to groan like heavy ropes drawn taut.

Slowly, very slowly, so slowly that he hardly knew it was in motion, he put out his right hand until the tips of his fingers touched a damp wall which sent stinging shivers up his spine. Then gingerly, equally as slowly, he advanced his left foot, the one with the sore, sensitive toe.

It took him five minutes to negotiate the first step inward and bring his right foot beside the left. He tried a dozen spots before he finally decided just where to place his left foot, knowing that the creak of a loose plank in the flooring would tear through the tense silence like a pistol-shot. He became the incarnation of cautious, noiseless mo-

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tion; all the workings of his mind were centered on this one thing—silence.

For a fraction of a second his teeth beat a low, nervous tattoo. Then he ground them together so fiercely that his jaws shivered. His minutest muscle buckled to its task, lifting and depositing with unprecedented, incredible pains the ounce or so assigned to it. The oppressive darkness gave him a sensation of being buried alive. He took twelve tedious, incalculably slow steps.

ALL of a sudden a vague intuition warned him of peril close at hand; he subtly sensed some other presence besides his own in that weird blackness, and he stiffened into alert immobility. He stopped breathing and listened, his vision digging into the ebony space ahead.

That strange telepathy that communicates between two radiant, pulsing bodies wirelessed that the danger lay behind him. It came to him in a flash—Cassidy! The man who sought him! His heart skipped a beat or two.

His first impulse was to turn on his persecutor and strike swiftly, like a snake trodden upon in the dark. But this he beat down with the dread possibility that Cassidy's revolver was already peeping at him through the intervening veil of obscurity, holding its fire until he sprang blindly toward its master. His clenched teeth had bitten into his lower lip and he could taste the warm blood in his mouth.

He waited, waited and listened, until he thought the top of his head would burst with the terrific pounding inside it, for it seemed that every drop of his blood was rushing upward to stimulate his hearing. When he could hold his breath no longer, he let it escape through his mouth so gently that the cold air almost forced it back, and it was at the instant his lungs were airless that he detected the all but imperceptible breathings of some other person.

He listened for a long time to these subdued sounds, counting them to assure himself they were human respirations, because he knew that in his high-wrought condition his imagination might easily have gulled him with alarming illusions. During this period Corwin breathed irregularly, laboriously, noiselessly, squandering not a breath more than bare existence necessitated.

He began to rotate slowly, carefully, with phenomenal patience, on the ball of his right foot and the heel of his left. It was painful drudgery that racked his whole body, for, at the same time, he had to balance and turn on what seemed to be two pivots of bare bone, so tender had the bottoms of his feet become.

In his sluggish half-revolution he made not a sound to echo through the sepulchral silence—the hand of a noiseless clock could hardly have traveled more quietly—and by degrees as he revolved he trimmed his body for instant action, releasing the rigid muscular lashings until they were just taut enough to hold him steady and motionless when he reached his final position. He brought his hands to the level of his chest and a little to the front, fingers distended, like invisible grappling-irons, bending his knees a trifle so that they could give like steel springs under a sudden shock.

The minutes wore on like years of black chaos, and at last Corwin's searching eyes made out a dim form, barely an arm's length away, silhouetted like a phantom against the faint grayness of the door through which Corwin had passed.

With supreme effort Corwin suppressed an involuntary start, and then watched, spellbound, like a man staring at an apparition. He lived through a seeming lifetime while waiting for the figure to move.

His eyes never left it once, his body became a living statue. His mind became highly imaginative, he actually believed he could hear himself thinking.

An infinite calm seemed to have enveloped the universe, all life save his own and Cassidy's being suspended in it, and he felt, too, that he must have journeyed to that outer, illimitable night-league beyond the orbit of the farthest sphere. He recalled reading somewhere that prolonged severe mental strains often deranged men's minds, and he wondered whether his own was able to hold out for an indefinite period.

For diversion he began to repeat the multiplication table in his head and he had reached the multiples of eight when he thought the shadowy figure moved ever so slightly in his direction. Cassidy was pursuing him! Corwin fought himself fiercely. He was on the verge of utter panic.

With deathlike backward steps Corwin put himself in motion but little faster than the flow of a glacier. Suddenly a board creaked faintly, setting the dead stillness aquiver with shrill vibrations that stung

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him like needles and almost swept away the control he had on his nerves. It seemed that a thousand walls had taken up the echoes of this one feeble sound.

While the air still shivered Corwin silently receded farther into the dense darkness, losing sight of his pursuer. Like a specter materializing it came in view again and paused as if conscious that its quarry was in flight.

Corwin suspended respiration in mid-breath and came to a crouch as if preparing to catapult on the man following him. He felt that he was cornered. Very carefully he raised his body on his toes several times in an effort to limber them, for they were so cold and numb that he was afraid that they might fail him in the critical moment now imminent.

The menacing figure seemed to have halted for all eternity and the uninterrupted strain on Corwin's nerves was becoming intolerable. Once there flitted through his mind the thought that daylight must be near. He wondered why Cassidy did not put a speedy finish to this excruciating suspense with a bullet; it was the worst sort of torture this waiting for he knew not what.

He suddenly became obsessed with that frantic desire for a quick, furious culmination that often seizes a man near the end of a long grinding vigil; he wanted something to happen. He would have even welcomed the collapse of the rickety old house.

At bay, he thought of the confession extorted from him when his powers of resistance were flagging, of the agonizing hours he had spent with Cassidy snapping at him every few minutes like a vicious dog, of his flight, his tormenting thirst, his nauseating hunger—thoughts that spurred him to battle desperately.

He determined that here in the gloomy hall where Minnie Schwartz was murdered was the proper setting for the dramatic finale—his life or Cassidy's.

An ungovernable impulse—the unexpected crash of his high nervous tension—upset his calculations for terminating matters by a series of deliberate, quick movements, swiftly executed: two short, noiseless steps, a lightninglike outstretching of his hands, and then the three-fingered grip, giving at most the muffled fall of a body to the floor or a few spasmodic gurgles to disturb the silence. For a negligible space he wrestled fiercely, futilely, with his frenzied self.

HALF-BENDING his knees, Corwin poised for a second as if suspended in air, inhaled quickly, deeply, as does the pearl-diver before the water closes over him, and then drove his body ahead by main force like a panther. Every muscle responded, working in tune as if each separate sinew were producing its share, no more, no less, of the impetus needed to perfect the spring.

The boards with a groan gave slightly under his feet, and in another second he was tussling madly with his prey. He landed flat against the man's body and wrapped himself about his victim like an angry incubus.

His hands grovelled savagely, brute-like, for the windpipe, his fingers ready and itching to nip it. But the other man rallied and bowed his head to repel the attack, and Corwin felt the jacket of neck-muscles grow impenetrably rigid as they glided into place like a protecting sheath of steel cables.

They fought silently like two dumb madmen, and gradually by sheer force the larger man broke Corwin's hold and for a second they stood off, a foot of cold murk between them. Then they closed again like a pair of blind wrestlers fencing for strangle-holds.

There was little noise of the struggle. Corwin's feet were bared, his opponent's stockinged, as he learned when he trampled on them; it was a silent, straining encounter. Once they broke apart and their arms tore wildly through the blackness before they grappled again. In the clinch blow followed blow, directionless, ineffective. Both men breathed heavily.

Suddenly from out of the mêlée of arms a fist shot upward, fouled Corwin's chin, and floored him as if his feet had been snatched from under him. Dazed, he tried to rise, but the giant crushed him to the cold floor and sunk his massive hands into Corwin's throat.

Murder ran through Corwin's brain, his own murder at Cassidy's hands—revenge not recapture, the sleuth sought. Self-defense would be Cassidy's loophole. Cold perspiration came out on Corwin's body.

He wallowed and fought frantically, but his captor, who seemed to have the strength of five men, dug deeper into his throat. Corwin bit at a hand that rested for a second over his mouth, and he heard a snarl of pain like a wounded beast's.

One by one the giant was fettering his

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captive's limbs. Fear gripped him. The thought of death here in this chill darkness where the girl met hers made him shudder.

He began to gasp. Suddenly a wild, derisive peal of laughter broke from his assailant, and like a flash came Corwin's dire realization that he was battling with some one other than the tireless sleuth. His utter helplessness dawned upon him, he was at the mercy of this invisible creature, he would be murdered unless some one came to his rescue.

In his terror his mind leaped to Cassidy, the man who was hounding him, the man who he felt was within call, and he decided swiftly to take his chances with the law rather than be garroted by the demon at his throat.

"Cassidy! Cassidy!" he screamed piercingly before a savage hand was clapped over his mouth, wrenching his jaw as if to tear it off.

Miles and miles away it seemed he heard the shrill answering blast of a police-whistle, followed by sounds as if the ramshackled house were tumbling in. A shower of heavy blows battered his face as he labored to get a breath past the vicelike fingers that throttled him.

He began to choke. His futile efforts to fill his lungs convulsed him, and his struggles grew feebler, like a rat's in the clutches of a terrier. Was Cassidy ever coming? Had his imagination deceived him? Suppose Cassidy had sickened of waiting and had quit and—his thoughts became mental blurs, he felt his lungs sucking vainly, spasmodically for air, and then his mind became a blank.

WHEN he opened his eyes the cellar was flooded with light and crowded with uniformed policemen. He drew his eyelids down quickly and listened to the loud, gruff talk that volumed from a dozen throats.

"Came down those steps like a troop of horses," spoke up one in the group. "Guess Cassidy was the wise boy yanking us out of the back yard. That guy could have walked all over the house—the whole bunch of us was snoozing 'cept Cassidy, and if he hadn't blowed his whistle we never would have waked up. Wonder what the row's about?"

When Corwin looked up again he found Cassidy, his face grimly asmile, standing over him. At his right two burly policemen were rolling about the floor on top of a struggling man.

"Get up, you're going back to Headquarters," greeted Cassidy unfeelingly as he nudged Corwin's ribs with his foot. "There's a pair of brogans and a kelly you left behind. Your partner's putting up a good scrap—had to kick him in the face before he'd turn you loose. Git up."

Corwin, pale and shaky, staggered to his feet, and, walled in by half a dozen formidable policemen, faced the sleuth.

"Tried to run away on me—won't give you another chance; going to tie you up this time," remarked Cassidy sneeringly, whereupon the group of policemen hooted vigorously and approvingly. "What're you doing here?"

The fugitive realized the futility of evasion, he was hopelessly beaten; his nerves were in a terrible flutter.

"Sneaked in here to hide," he confessed in a quavering voice. "Thought I could creep to the attic and wait till you got tired. That's God's truth. I don't know this other fellow—he followed me—I thought he was—was you."

Cassidy looked dubious, and several of his confederates snickered. One uniformed wag commented:

"He's pulling old stuff on you, Cassidy. You're too foxy to swallow that."

"You're all alike, you folks with blood on your hands," said the detective. "You've got to come back and take a squint at what you did. Never knew it to fail. Guess you was 'fraid to come alone. I ain't sure whether you really thought you was going to fool me, or whether there warn't something that sort of pulled——"

A loud snort of surprise interrupted Cassidy—it emanated from one of the policemen who had overpowered the man on the floor and dragged him to his feet by the scruff of his neck.

"—— if it ain't blood!" he sung out loudly as he opened the man's vest. "Dried blood! Lots of it on his shirt! It's blood all right. Look here, Cassidy!"

A third policeman searched the man, swiftly and deftly running his practised hands into the lining and pockets of his shabby attire. Tucked away in an inside pocket was a girl's small handkerchief, blood-splotched.

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The policeman handed it to Cassidy, who examined it. The blue-coated cluster grunted simultaneously and craned their necks to obtain a better view. The owner of the handkerchief grinned at the curiosity it excited.

"Where'd the claret come from?" demanded Cassidy, dangling the handkerchief at the prisoner. "Cut out that cackling. Where'd you get the claret?"

The man's lips worked nervously, his expression changed slowly, and his eyes shone with an insane light.

"Look out, Cassidy, he's a bug," cautioned one of the policemen.

"Come on, come on," urged Cassidy. "Where'd you get the claret, the blood?"

The sleuth came nearer and waved the handkerchief in the man's face.

"Whose is it?" he rasped.

"It's Minnie's! It's Minnie's! I killed her!" screamed the captive wildly, tearing from the policemen who held him and leaping straight for Cassidy.

But the detective sidestepped nimbly and a dozen hands shot out to grasp the madman.

"It's homicidal mania. Put the cuffs on him; that's the man we want," said Cassidy shortly. "He's the fellow who was hanging around here all day yesterday. Asked me to let him go inside and have a look."

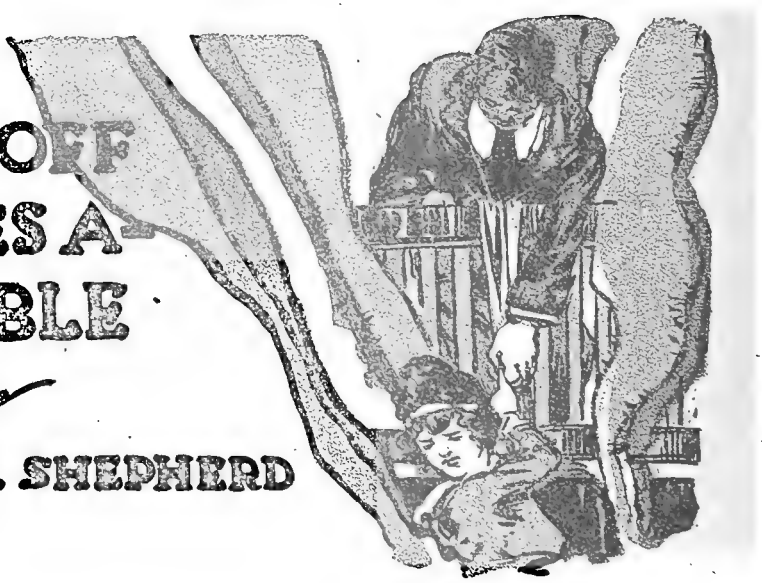
Then turning to the bewildered, trembling fugitive:

"Come on, Corwin, I'll turn you out as soon as we get this guy to Headquarters—and I don't want ever to see your popeyes again. Here," the sleuth fished in his pocket and drew out a folded paper, "here's that fairy-tale you piped yesterday morning. I was leery of it from the start. I reckon I'd have done the same thing—a man'll say 'most anything when he's good and thirsty, and ain't had any sleep."

IVANOFF TAKES A TUMBLE

by

GEORGE SHEPHERD



IVANOFF was in great trouble. Now, as we all know, the strangely interwoven tangle of cause and effect in this world is one of its chief wonders, so that it is not remarkable that to get at the beginning of Ivanoff's difficulty we must go back many years to a certain day of grief when a horse called Mentusa, an odds on favorite, did not win the Melbourne Cup.

It was a glorious harvest for the bookies and a devastating calamity for the betting public. The latter in their agony promptly threw the blame on Tim Flanagan the jockey, frantically and with very poor sportsmanship declaring that he had "pulled" the horse. As a matter of fact he had not, but having bet his last shilling on Mentusa, had ridden the race of his life. But it availed him not, and it became necessary for him to

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move on, for he had no money and in all of Australia he could not get a mount.

Tim got a job as mess-boy on a sailing-ship bound for San Francisco, where, so he had heard, there were horses; and where there are horses there are races, he reasoned. The ship touched at the Hawaiian Islands, and going ashore at Hilo, Tim contrived to break his leg; as an excuse, he used to tell his friends afterward. Tim died some twenty years later, not more than a score of miles from the spot where the accident had happened. Such is the compelling charm of those islands which their inhabitants well call the Paradise of the Pacific.

During those twenty years Tim rose to be foreman of Mr. Bruce MacIntyre's horse and cattle ranch on the island of Hawaii, and besides acquitting himself well in the affairs strictly pertaining to his position, he had, on more than one occasion, shown the natives a thing or two about riding a race. Also he had married.

His wife was a living, breathing, most attractive refutation of the biological law which says you must not cross too widely divergent strains. Anglo-Saxon blood she had in predominance probably, and for the rest there was some native Hawaiian—a scion of the old Kamehameha royalty having entangled himself in one branch of the family tree—a dash of Chinese and more than a hint of Spanish. She made Tim a good wife and bore him a daughter who had her father's blue eyes and sense of humor and her mother's beauty of face and figure, and her skill in handling any person of the opposite sex without his even suspecting the manipulation.

Mr. Bruce MacIntyre and his foreman, the loser of the Melbourne Cup, died about the same time, but Donald MacIntyre, who inherited among other things the Hawaiian ranch, was not the sort of young man to turn adrift the family of one of his father's retainers, so the widow Flanagan and her daughter Kitty continued to occupy their cottage and a modest position on the ranch payroll.

IVANOFF, as you may know or at least guess from his name, was supposed to be a Russian. Really he was nothing of the kind, but a direct descendant of the nomadic Turkomans who for centuries have ridden their Arabs over the deserts between the Caspian and the Aral seas.

Young MacIntyre had discovered him working as a foundry laborer in Honolulu, and because of the man's wonderful instinct for handling horses, doubtless inherited from his desert-riding ancestors, had brought him over to Hawaii and put him on the ranch. There Ivanoff had lived for a year and no one had ever been able to discover that more than two abstract ideas had ever penetrated his none too swiftly working brain. One was blind devotion and loyalty to his master who had brought him into the environment in which he properly belonged, and the other was love for the wonderful horse Gunpowder, which his master had given him.

Otherwise he was a primitive, barbaric sort of fellow, who knew what he wanted when he wanted it and always traveled the most direct road to his object with consequences which were sometimes startling to more complex minds.

With a truly Asiatic point of view Ivanoff had always regarded women as a sort of superior class of chattels, only one step below horses. Then he encountered Kitty Flanagan.

ONE bright morning in the dry season, when he had been giving Gunpowder an exercise gallop, he stopped at the Flanagan cottage for a drink of water. It was a pleasant little frame dwelling, almost smothered in flowers and vines, and nestling in a dry, turf-carpeted gulch a mile away from the main ranch-buildings. Ivanoff rode around to the back door and made his request of Mrs. Flanagan who stood inside the kitchen window, whence floated out a ravishing odor of hot biscuits.

"Kitty," called the good widow, "take the man out some water."

The kitchen door opened and Miss Kitty stood on the step with a glass in one hand and a pitcher in the other. She was not at all the kind of person one would have thought to see in that humble cottage. Dark reddish hair, sparkling blue eyes, a slightly tip-tilted nose, with a few freckles to give it expression, a tantalizingly quirky sort of a mouth and a trim little figure.

Ivanoff had not arrived at that stage of civilization where men hesitate to look openly at that which they wish to see, so he stared at her with an appalling directness which, accustomed as she was to attention, she found a trifle disconcerting. It was the

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more disconcerting because, due to the slow working of Ivanoff's brain, it took a long time for a new impression to register itself, and so at first his scrutiny was merely inquisitive and not admiring, as Kitty had a right to expect. She was piqued. That a man should just stare at her, just blankly stare at her, without any sign of appreciative enthusiasm, was not to be tolerated.

"Have some more. I know you're thirsty," she said refilling the glass and letting her mouth slip into a smile which had never yet failed her.

"Yes," replied Ivanoff, still staring.

Kitty was on her mettle. This strange creature was looking at her as if she were no more than a prize cabbage. She would show him.

"That's a fine horse you are riding," she remarked on the love-me-love-my-dog theory.

"Yes " said Ivanoff, continuing to stare.

"A very fine horse," went on Kitty, while thinking what her next move would be.

But the impression had at last registered itself. Ivanoff understood what it was that interested him so. His face lit up and he spoke his thought without any foolish concealment.

"You are—how you say—damn pretty!" he said and turned to his horse, leaving Kitty gasping on the door-step.

Though it took a long time to get anything into Ivanoff's head, once there it stuck.

NEXT morning he was back at the door of the Flanagan kitchen asking for more water. Kitty brought it to him, consumed with curiosity to hear with what sledge-hammer compliment he would assail her this time. She was soon satisfied.

"I think," said Ivanoff, looking her over judicially, when he had finished drinking, "I like you to be my wife. All right?"

The pitcher dropped on the ground and broke into a hundred pieces. She looked at Ivanoff and saw that he was in deadly earnest. Then she laughed. There were few young men on the ranch who had not expressed the same sentiment, but never had it been hurled at her head like this.

"Why certainly," she assented gleefully. "But when? Today or next week?"

"I think more better next week," replied Ivanoff solemnly. "I speak to Mr. MacIntyre and get a house to live in."

"Whenever you say, of course," said Kitty demurely, wrinkling her nose so that two of the freckles ran into each other.

Ivanoff rode straight to MacIntyre.

"Master," he said to him, "can you give me a house, please—a little one?"

"Why, yes, I suppose so," replied MacIntyre. "But why, Ivanoff?" he added, wondering a little, for the man had always insisted on sleeping in a little room next to his own quarters.

"I get married," said Ivanoff.

MacIntyre whistled.

"When and how did you cook this up, Ivanoff?" he asked. "And who is she?"

"I don't know," was Ivanoff's calm reply.

Because he knew his man MacIntyre did not laugh. With some difficulty he got a sufficiently explicit description of the girl and where she lived to arrive at her identity and then posted off to the Flanagan cottage to find out what Ivanoff was up to.

When he came back he called the man into his room.

"Ivanoff," he inquired, "do you know the meaning of the English word 'flirt'? "

"No, master," replied Ivanoff.

"Well, I have no doubt that you will soon be taught. Now, tell me, do you really want to marry her?"

"Yes, master," answered Ivanoff with a simple sincerity which was quite convincing.

"All right then," said MacIntyre. "On the whole she might do worse. You're dependable, which is more than most of these young fellows here are. So I'll help you. Now in the first place you must understand that she was only joking when she said she'd have you. . . ."

"But it is I who will have her!"

MacIntyre repressed a grin.

"I know, but that's not her idea of it. No, you have got to keep after her for a while yet. Then in the second place she considers herself a cut above you. Her father was a foreman, you see. But that is easily fixed. I am going to make you a foreman yourself and put you in charge of the stables. So ride down tomorrow and tell her you have been promoted."

Ivanoff did as MacIntyre directed, and Kitty was impressed, though she took good care not to let him see it. Also she was impressed when after Ivanoff and Gunpowder had come lightly sailing over the back fence, the man dismounted by the simple expedient of making the horse lie down under-

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neath him. But she concealed that as well, and scoffingly accused him of trying to show off; which happened to be the truth.

"I can't marry you today," she announced airily. "There's cake to bake."

"All right," agreed Ivanoff with Oriental patience. "Bimeby then."

"And tomorrow's washing-day."

"All right. I bring my clothes. You wash 'em."

Kitty changed the subject.

"When we get married I am going to ride that horse every day," she said, looking at Ivanoff to see how he would be affected by the matter-of-fact assumption that they would indeed be married. But instead of getting the rise from him she expected, she received a wholesome shock herself.

"No," he answered with adamant firmness. "You no ride Gunpowder."

It came to her not only as a shock, but as an enlightening and much-needed experience. Of all her many suitors Ivanoff was the first thus flatly to deny a request of hers. She tossed her head and sniffed. "Oh, well, if you think more of the horse than of me, that settles it."

"You think we get married next week all right?" inquired Ivanoff solicitously.

The girl turned and went into the house without answering. She was beginning to be a little afraid he would knock her down and drag her off.

THE next day, alas, there came a calamity which threatened a sad setback to Ivanoff's prospects. MacIntyre was wandering about the stables when certain strange sounds led him to a disused store-room. There, firmly triced to a post, was a blubbering Kanaka, receiving at Ivanoff's hands a painstaking and thorough flogging.

"Stop it!" shouted MacIntyre. "What's got into you? What are you whipping him for?"

"This man, his job to feed and water horses," explained Ivanoff. "Last night he get drunk. Ten horses no get feed or water." He made ready to resume the well-deserved castigation.

"But you can't do that to him," said MacIntyre hastily. "It's not allowed."

Ivanoff put down the whip and began to untie the man. He could see no reason why the man should not be flogged, and a perfectly sound one to justify the punishment; but the master said to stop.

But from this incident MacIntyre realized that however much he personally might appreciate Ivanoff's native virtues, he was not a safe man to handle free-born ranch-hands in a country where the courts were open to all. So regretfully he deposed Ivanoff from his new position. Ivanoff felt it keenly, but nothing could shake his loyalty to his master, so he made no complaint. But he did feel disappointed that he was no longer the social equal of the aggravating young lady with the tip-tilted nose who, as he had determined, was to be his wife.

His determination was not altered, however. Ivanoff, though he could not have expressed what he felt in any known language, was actually in love. And the fact that his fine romantic frenzy was compelled to simmer, incoherent, behind his stolid exterior, did not tend to cool it down in the least. So, like disconsolate lovers since the world began, he went off to tell his beloved of his misfortune.

To show that he was not yet down and out he entered the Flanagan preserves by jumping the fence and slipping out of the saddle and dropping his feet on the ground at the same time the horse landed.

"Go on with you," scoffed the not unappreciative Kitty from an open window. "Anybody could do it on that horse. When are you going to let me ride him?"

Ivanoff did not deign to answer. To love a woman and to let her ride a horse which no human being but oneself is ever allowed to throw a leg over, are two entirely different things. Then, too, a man must not let himself be run by his own women-folk. He came directly to the object of his visit.

"No more foreman," he said gravely.

"What?" Kitty burst out. "And is it that you're one of them worthless fellows that can't keep a job for more than a day? What did they fire you for?"

Ivanoff told her and prepared himself for a scathing rebuke.

But witness the unexpectedness of woman.

"You poor, dear man!" she exclaimed. "And the brute let the poor horses go without water all night, and they wouldn't let you beat him. Come in and I'll give you some cake and cream and tell you what I think of such doings."

Ivanoff, a little dazed, went into the spick and span kitchen and was fed cake and cream while Kitty expressed quite freely

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her approval of what he had done, and her condemnation of Mr. MacIntyre. But after a while, for fear she had been too encouraging, she began to bedevil him.

"But I'm afraid it's a very bad, violent man you are, after all," she said with a look of mock fear and a wrinkling of her nose. "Now tell me, when we get married—which will be in twenty years' time no doubt—if I should burn the biscuits or put salt in the coffee, would you beat me?"

Ivanoff considered.

"I might," he said finally with perfect seriousness, "if you did it on purpose."

Kitty shuddered. She looked at his graceful sinewy arms, and the swelling muscles of chest and shoulder which were scarcely concealed by his light cotton shirt. He must be wonderfully strong and powerful, she thought. She had a strange feeling which she could not quite explain, though it was not entirely repulsion.

"Go on with you now," she said hastily. "I have work to do."

THE next day Ivanoff returned in high spirits. He had been promoted again. The master had made him a foreman "at large." True he had no men subject to his orders, nor was he to interfere with those who were in charge of other foremen, still he was a foreman and so entitled and rated.

But whereas Kitty had been all sympathy when he had bad fortune, now that it had changed to good, she jeered at him unmercifully.

"You a foreman!" she declared scornfully. "Why, it's only a sham and a fake that you are. How can you be a foreman when you have no gang under you? Mr. MacIntyre is foolin' you, nothing more. And you don't know any better, you big stupid!" In which she landed fairly on the head of the nail, for the arrangement was merely an ingenious device of MacIntyre's for giving Ivanoff the necessary prestige without running any more chances with his medieval methods of enforcing discipline.

Having started in that vein, the girl, with well-calculated malice, began to tease him to let her ride Gunpowder. But she might better have asked him to cut off an arm.

"Nobody—not even master—ever ride Gunpowder," he insisted.

"Not even if we get married, won't you let me ride him?" she pled with a languishing look.

"No," said Ivanoff.

"Well, suppose I told you," she persisted, "that I would never marry you until you did let me ride him. . . . I don't mean I will if you do," she added quickly.

"We get married all right, but you no ride Gunpowder," said Ivanoff with maddening composure.

She stamped her little foot angrily.

"Then I do tell you," she snapped, "that *never, never* will I marry you until you let me ride that horse — and probably not then!"

Ivanoff was not nearly as much impressed as he would have been had he not remembered the first morning he had proposed matrimony to her, and how she had calmly assented without meaning a word of what she said. Mere talk from a woman need not be believed, it seemed. And this sort of empty, foolish talk which arrives nowhere must be that "flirt" thing his master had spoken of. It would be just as well, he thought, to tell her he understood as much.

"I think you too much flirt," he said.

Instantly he discovered it does not always do to speak the truth to a lady, particularly if she is red-headed, half Irish and secretly a little ashamed of the way she is behaving.

The dainty, fragile Kitty grabbed a broom and chased Ivanoff out of the door. Then she went to her room and cried; sheer temper, of course.

To a man of Ivanoff's temperament (or lack of it, rather) such incidents do not constitute a bar to further converse, so he was back the next day; and not only that day but many, many more in succession thereafter. He was a single-minded, persistent fellow who knew what he wanted when he wanted it, and made no bones about going after it.

The treatment he received varied with the calendar. That is to say, in August he was permitted to enjoy thirty-one of Miss Flanagan's different moods, while in September he was diverted by only thirty. But there was a single connecting thread of uniformity which ran through all her repertoire, one question she never failed to ask. When was she to be allowed to ride Gunpowder? And though the answer was always a firm and definite "never," she did not become discouraged; at least she did

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not give it up. Miss Flanagan, you will note, was in her own sweet way quite as persistent as Ivanoff.

THERE came a day when, as Ivanoff was making his daily visit during the short evening twilight, Kitty expressed annoyance because she did not have a hair-ribbon of a particular shade of blue to wear to a dance the next night. It was quite impossible to obtain it nearer than Hilo, she said; and as that was a good twenty-five miles away, it was now too late.

"What color?" asked Ivanoff.

"Blue," she said peevishly.

"But show me," he said.

So she produced a bit of ribbon left over from some dress trimming which she said was the right shade. Ivanoff put it in his pocket.

"I get it," he stated. At which she laughed at him for a big silly. How was he going to get ribbon from Hilo when he had to work all the next day?

Early the next morning she heard unaccustomed hoof-beats on the gravel path, and looking out saw Ivanoff riding a strange gray horse and coming in the gate instead of over the fence.

"Where's Gunpowder?" she demanded.

"Gunpowder's tired. I let him rest," he replied, springing jauntily to the ground in spite of a long night in the saddle. From inside his shirt he produced a bulky parcel and handed it to her.

"Whatever has the man got?" she said, fumbling at the string.

The paper undone, there was revealed the hair-ribbon and another ribbon beside of the same color, soft and filmy, nearly a foot wide and yards and yards long.

"A — a — what you call it," explained Ivanoff running his hand around his waist.

"A sash!" exclaimed Kitty, her blue eyes snapping with pleasure. "But what a length to it! You must have got all they had."

"Yes," answered Ivanoff. "Six yards. Enough?"

"Yes, indeed," said Kitty, thinking it was lucky the ribbon was soft material, else she would never be able to use half its length. "And it's a dear man you are altogether."

Perhaps if Ivanoff had grasped his opportunity in that moment he might have broken down Kitty's guard. He had ridden all night, nearly got himself shot by the shopkeeper he had routed from his bed, spent nearly a month's pay on the gift, and (though this was a fortuitous miracle) brought Kitty the very thing she had been wanting for her best white China silk. But the stupid fellow was not sufficiently quick-witted to move up his forces and pour horse, foot and dragoons through the breach he had made. Instead, he mounted the gray gelding and rode off to his day's work.

That afternoon Ivanoff went to MacIntyre and, with simple directness and much the manner of a boy asking his father for a fishing-rod, asked his master to teach him to dance. MacIntyre, greatly amused, first elicited the reason for the strange request and then took him into the house, and turning on the phonograph, showed him the rudiments of the waltz and two-step.

Ivanoff, as lithe and graceful as the thoroughbred horses he loved so, got the hang of the thing in no time. Moreover he was indefatigable, and with serious face he one-two-threed about the room the entire afternoon, long after MacIntyre was ready to drop with fatigue.

EARLY in the evening he slipped a saddle on Gunpowder and cantered the two miles to the hamlet where the dance was being given. He arrived half an hour before even the musicians.

The building where the dance was to be held was a long two-story affair with a single big, loft-like room on the top floor, which, bedecked with flowers and greens, made a presentable enough ballroom. From the ground floor a single flight of steps led up the outside of the building. At the foot of these Ivanoff took post. He had come for the purpose of seeing Kitty, and see her he would the instant she arrived.

She was among the first comers, she and her mother driving up in a trap. There were other cavaliers waiting. One of these instantly ran to the horse's head with a polite offer to put it up. Ivanoff made no attempt to rob him of the privilege. Two others closed in as Mrs. Flanagan and her daughter made to descend from the trap. Ivanoff stood squarely and immovably opposite the step, grasped Kitty's hand as she stepped down and led her up the stairs, leaving his less forceful rivals to dance attendance on her mother.

"You dance with me," he announced.

She looked at him for an instant from

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beneath lowered eyelids, thinking how straight and strong and fine-looking he was, and what a domineering, masterful way he had. Then she said:

"But good gracious, you can't dance. And I am not going to have you walking on my feet."

They were at the door of the room and the music was playing, so to Ivanoff it seemed quite useless to make any answer. He put his arm about her waist and the first thing Kitty knew she was waltzing with him; nor were her little satin slippers being trodden on.

When the waltz was over Kitty managed to dig out of the taciturn Ivanoff that he had been taking lessons in order to be able to dance with her, and who his teacher had been. Ivanoff quite neglected his manifest opportunities for gallant speeches in telling her, but nevertheless both of these facts made more than a little impression on the discerning Kitty. It gave her a feeling of very comfortable satisfaction that the owner of the ranch should take Ivanoff into his house and personally give him a dancing lesson. Just why this act of kindness to Ivanoff should be a delicate attention to her, Kitty's mind, usually quite logical, did not take the trouble to explain. Still she felt that it was so.

But as the room filled with young people it became apparent that Ivanoff had not yet mastered the art of guiding in a crowd. So Kitty no longer let him dance with her, less because of the annoyance of being bumped into, than because it made her so uncomfortable to have him seem the least bit ridiculous or awkward. But she sat out with him often.

THEN came the hour for supper. The dancers began to troop below and as the crowded floor thinned out they had another dance. The music ended with a blare and the musicians started downstairs.

"Don't let's eat now," said Ivanoff as they stopped. "Too many people down there. Out here better."

He led the way and she followed willingly to a balcony at the end of the room, a little gallery hanging far above the ground which sloped away from the rear of the building.

It was very still outside. The moon, round and placid, hanging over the dome-like summit of Mauna Loa, bathed the wide, gently sloping plain with soft, serene radiance. By its subtle witchery the immensity of space seemed vastly foreshortened, and the whole visible world became very small. By the same magic the whole world of human thoughts and emotions and passions was merged and concentrated into a single note. Each of them was conscious of nothing but the other standing close by.

Kitty leaned over the railing, gazing out into the moonlight—and seeing nothing of what lay before her eyes. Then instinctively she started back, for the new sash had been resting on the dusty rail. She smoothed it around her waist and saw Ivanoff's eyes following her hands in a caress she could almost feel.

Her breathing quickened.

"I shall keep it always," she whispered. "It's—it's very pretty."

"Yes," said Ivanoff, speaking not of the sash, but of the slender waist it encircled and the hands which were smoothing it.

He moved a little closer, until her hair almost brushed his face; and she stood very still.

And then perverse fate made a horse whinny far off in the stables.

"Ivanoff," she said, "please, please, let me ride Gunpowder just once."

"No," answered Ivanoff.

"Just once—please."

"No."

Then they were silent; she, half regretting her speech and wishing there were some way to unsay it which would not involve backing down; he, vexed and stubbornly persistent.

For a long time neither spoke.

Below, somewhere near the front of the building, there was a loud report.

"What was that?" she exclaimed.

"Nothing," he answered reassuringly. "Some one get drunk I guess. Shoot off gun."

But in a few seconds there came the sound of excited cries and people running about below.

"We had better find out what it is," said the girl.

"All right," he replied. "I look see. You wait here."

A little surprised at her own obedience she waited. In half a minute he was back.

"Fire," he said calmly. "I think kerosene stove blow up."

Kitty ran for the door.

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"Quick!" she called. "We must get out."

Ivanoff followed her. "No, no. Not that way. The stairs on fire," he shouted.

But with him at her heels Kitty raced the length of the room only to find that he was right. The staircase was a roaring, crackling mass of flames.

The whole building was tinder-dry, and even in the few seconds they stood watching, the blaze was spreading over its entire front. Then a tongue of flame, leaping from the open stairway, set fire to the wall in one corner of the room in which they stood.

"What are we going to do?" said Kitty bravely. Then as Ivanoff rushed toward the burning stairway, she shrieked, "No! No! No!"

BUT Ivanoff had not lost his head and had no intention of plunging into the flames. He only went as close as he could and then with all the strength of his lungs shouted to the people below, for otherwise no one might know that they were there.

"Now back," he said as he returned to Kitty.

The building, originally designed for a barn, had no windows along the sides, so they ran back to the little gallery at the rear, below which presently gathered a crowd shouting advice and encouragement. Some of the more excitable ones called on them to jump.

"Shall we have to jump, do you think, Ivanoff?" asked Kitty, shivering a little as she looked at the twenty-five-foot drop to the ground below.

"No. It will be all right," he answered. "The men will bring a ladder."

A dozen of them were already hunting for one. They seemed an interminable time about it. At the front of the building the fire had already eaten through the thin wall of dry planks, and now the draft sucking in brought the flames roaring down the long room toward the balcony where they stood. Already they could feel the heat of it on their faces.

At last, with a great shouting, some men rushed into the light below carrying a ladder. With more shouting they raised it; to find that it was ten feet short. The shouting changed to groans.

"Jump!" called half a dozen voices. "You'll have to jump—there's no other ladder!"

Ivanoff took a quick look at the room behind them. It was fast becoming a roaring furnace of red flame. And they could feel the scorching heat even through their clothes.

"A rope, idiots!" he called. "And quick."

The men scattered again. Just as a tongue of flame reached out of a window which gave on the balcony, one of them came racing back.

"Catch!" he yelled, and hurled a bundle of rope at Ivanoff. It fell short and the crowd groaned. Once more he threw and this time Ivanoff caught it.

It was a rope sure enough, but wofully slender and frayed. Ivanoff made it fast to a corner post, ran the length of the gallery with the loose end and pulled. It snapped before he had thrown half his weight upon it. He ran back to the place where it had broken and Kitty came and stood close beside him. Her face looked very white in the fierce glow that came from the flames within, and her lips quivered a little.

"Shall I jump, Ivanoff?" she asked.

"No, no," he answered. "Let me tie it. Perhaps it will hold the next time."

While Ivanoff was fumbling with the broken ends the girl's calmness suddenly deserted her.

"Wait! Wait!" she called to him. "I've got it." Then with frantic haste she began to undo her long sash. The soft material had been wound many times around her waist so the unwinding took precious seconds; but even before she had it off Ivanoff had tied a loop in one end.

"Hold in this," he directed. "I'll let you down."

"And you?" she faltered.

"I'll come all right. Hurry!"

So to an accompaniment of wild cheers he lowered her hand over hand until she let go and dropped the last two feet to the ground. The crowd rushed about her and tried to bear her off, but she waved them back and stood still where she had dropped, looking up at the balcony.

"Hurry, Ivanoff! Hurry!" she cried.

IVANOFF pulled up the sash. And then he did what for sheer quixoticism would have put to shame any edelweiss-for-his-lady-love hero who ever existed in fact or fiction. He conceived the utterly insane idea of saving the sash for Kitty. Instead of tying one end to the post

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and leaving plenty of length for him to slide down, he took it at the middle and made a running hitch, so that two ends hung down, one of which would stand the strain of his weight, while a sharp pull on the other would loose the knot.

Then he called on those below to hold up the ladder directly underneath him. It took them a little time to grasp what he meant, because they could see no reason for such a proceeding. But finally it occurred to some one that it must be that Ivanoff was afraid to trust his weight to a single strand of the sash and that doubled it would not reach the distance.

A group of men held the ladder erect beneath him. He lowered himself until his feet caught the next to the top rung, seized the ladder with one hand and with the other gave a sharp jerk to undo the knot. And that same jerk was nearly the undoing of Ivanoff as well. It was just enough to swing the ladder a little out of balance, the foot of one of the men bracing it slipped; and sash, ladder and Ivanoff came tumbling to the ground.

Even so Ivanoff, as nimble as a cat, would have escaped unhurt if some careless field-hand had not left a sharp-edged cane knife lying on the ground exactly where he struck it with his arm. It cut a long gash on the inside of his forearm, but in the excitement of his rescue and the shock of the fall he never noticed it.

He jumped quickly to his feet and every one crowded about him. Kitty hung to one arm, Mrs. Flanagan forgot her dignity and clung to the other, and all of them ran back from the burning building. Nor did Ivanoff forget to carry the sash safely away.

Presently Kitty discovered that her hands were wet with blood, and that the blood came from Ivanoff's arm. They took him to the nearest house, found the long, ugly gash and bandaged it, everybody helping and offering sympathy and Ivanoff laughing and protesting that it was nothing. When the bandaging was finished Ivanoff was persuaded to sit still and rest for a while. Some one gave him a cigaret and he smoked it with great placidity and content, until, when it was about half done, it quietly dropped from his mouth and he rolled off the bench in a dead faint.

Kitty threw herself on her knees at his side and tore off the bandage. She was no girl of milk and water, afraid of the sight of the blood of the man she loved; and she knew too what it meant when that blood came bright red and in jets, one to each heart-beat. And more than one good man has been suffered to bleed quietly to death for lack of this knowledge.

She must put on a tourniquet and lose no time about it. And a tourniquet she put on, twisted tight around his elbow and fashioned from the very first thing which came to her hand—one end of the new sash. But it was only a temporary measure. They must have a doctor without any delay.

"I'll fetch him," said Kitty, and slipping out of the room ran for the stables. Ivanoff regained consciousness just in time to see her run out of the door.

Two miles to the ranch headquarters where the doctor lived and two miles back.

IN FIFTEEN minutes Kitty and the doctor came into the room. Then it was plain sailing. The doctor had Ivanoff carried to a bedroom, shut out everybody but Kitty and her mother and had a ligature on the artery and the wound dressed in a trice.

"Tell me," said Ivanoff when he had gone, "how did you get him so quick?"

"I rode for him," answered Kitty, not meeting his eyes.

"What horse?" he demanded.

"Gunpowder."

Ivanoff's jaw set tight; an angry gleam came into his eyes. But the hot blood can not mount to a man's head when he has just lost the most of it. A fit of temper under such circumstances is a physical impossibility. So he closed his eyes again. Presently he opened them and looked at her with his accustomed stolidity.

"Then I think we get married tomorrow," he said.

"All right," she whispered.

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The LAST ADVENTURE of DICK ANTHONY in PERSIA

By Talbot Mundy

LET ANY man who doubts the love men bore Dick Anthony go ask the Persians who trudged through the mud behind him to fight whom Dick told them to. Ask others of that country, who never so much as saw him, but who formed their estimate of him from tales brought home by those subjected to his discipline. Or ask Andry—grim, tremendous Andry.

Nowadays Andry is back in Scotland, near the Kyles of Bute whose rocks and cross-currents he knows so intimately. Marie Macdougal, who was Marie Mouquin with a knife-wound in her shoulder when this story opens, mothers the big man very carefully because the German saber-thrust between his fourth and fifth ribs is not quite healed yet. She objects to his talking of the past, for fear lest he go in search of Dick. So in the house it would be no use to ask him.

But look for him somewhere out among the fields or barns of Dick's estate by Lamlash, leaning on a stout ash sapling, stewarding Dick's worldly goods. You will find him dour, distrustful as he looks, and given like most strong men to deep silences; but he will answer, if you ask him what he thinks of Dick. He is likely to spit into his great leathery hands, look into the wind and ask to be shown Dick's equal.

There would be no use trying to ask Jenison, for if you could find him Dick would be somewhere near, since nowadays the two hunt new game together, and bigger game than ordinary. Jenison, being American and quite irreverent, would point Dick out to you and bid you throw a stone at him and see.

If you asked the Russian Government about him you would learn, if you learned anything at all, that there is an opposite to

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love, too often misnamed hate, that really is a sense of guilt. But individual Russians will admit that of all their modern foemen Dick was the stoutest, most ingenious, and least corruptible.

Incorruptibility—the logical, completely unexpected—unworldliness, yet a most amazing understanding of the world—above all that calm effrontery that is the birthright only of men who deal in truth—sat strangely on a red-haired, bare-headed boy of twenty-five, in the rain on a devastated battle-field.

And *he* sat strangely—on the pole of a Russian provision-wagon—looking about him, listening and saying nothing. Strange men sat near him. On the far end of the pole was Jenison, fat and unshaven, looking dissolute through the gun-smoke that had blackened all his face. His eyes peeped red-rimmed through the grime, for he had served a gun all night, in the teeth of a whistling wind.

Completing the triangle, perched uncomfortably on a big, unopened biscuit-box, was the General of the Russian cavalry brigade that Dick had whipped. He was the only military-looking person of the three, for Dick wore no uniform, and Jenison would not have worn one had he had the right.

The General was in possession of his sword still, a fact which seemed to cause the American some slight uneasiness, for the butt of a .45 protruded from his torn hip-pocket and the heel of his hand was ready by.

"What's the time?" asked Dick.

Jenison drew out his watch with his left hand, and held it where he could see the time without losing sight of the Russian for an instant.

"Seven-ten," he answered. "Teheran time."

It looked more like the quarter-hour that just precedes sunrise, for the watery sky was screened by a curtain of rain, and the covered wagons loomed out of murky twilight.

"No sign or word of Usbeg Ali?"

"None."

"No sign of breakfast?"

"I can smell it!" said Jenison, peering through the rain in the direction of a wagon that Dick's servant had taken over from the Russians. Then a mud-draggled Persian, smothered from head to foot in blankets to keep off the rain, emerged from shadow, beckoning.

"Thank God!" said Jenison.

Dick looked at the Russian.

"Care to join us at breakfast?" He spoke as if the General were a free agent with a dozen or more alternatives.

"I would be glad," he answered in perfectly good English.

Even the defeated General observed the decencies, and spoke as if Dick were inviting him to a meal not plundered from his own commissariat. He may have found consolation in his certain knowledge that the eatables would be from cases packed in Petersburg.

DICK led the way to the General's tent and Jenison brought up the rear, with a hand yet nearer to his pistol-butt, for the Russian could have cut Dick down with his sword easily, and with Dick dead there would have been an end of the campaign.

"Sorry to have to use your tent," said Dick, "but I've none of my own. You caught me in a hurry, traveling light."

He motioned the General to a seat at the table, and the General unhooked his sword to lay it on the camp-bed. With a grunt of relief Jenison took his eye from the General's right hand for the first time in an hour. The only thing he had ever found that could make him nervous was Dick's disregard of a certain kind of chances. Now, utterly unnervous, he settled down to eat like an adventurer.

"Ah!" said Dick suddenly.

Jenison and the Russian each looked up and followed the direction of Dick's eye toward the camp-bed. From under the one thin pillow there protruded newspapers.

"I'll have to trouble you for those," said Dick, and without a word Jenison got up and reached for them.

"They're printed in Russian," he said, handing them to Dick.

There were four papers, and Dick folded them without a word of comment. The fact that he knew Russian, and could read it nearly as fluently as English, was knowledge that so far he had kept strictly to himself.

They ate in silence, and the Russian proved a good trencherman considering the fact that he was a beaten man and therefore dispirited. The coffee and the

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canned food were not such as men generally share on battle-fields, and presently the General produced cigars so excellent that for a minute or more the tent was filled with memories, and no one spoke.

"Are you holding me to ransom?" asked the Russian suddenly.

His eyes looked cunning, but his full, square-bottomed beard concealed the corners of his mouth, and he might have been merely inquisitive. Jenison pricked up his ears and crossed one leg over the other.

"At the present moment I'm waiting for word from Usbeg Ali Khan, my second-in-command," said Dick. "He's supposed to be pursuing the remnant of your force into Persia."

"What good will that do you?" asked the Russian, as a father might argue with his son, a trifle patronizingly. He waved his cigar in a gesture that the West has never learned to imitate.

Dick looked interested but did not answer.

"Mr. Anthony, the wise man, when he holds a momentary advantage, makes the utmost use of it! What use can you make of me? I speak in my own interests, and Russia's, as much as yours of course; but what do you propose to do with me?"

The rain drummed on the sodden canvas of the tent, and a little stream splashed on the table between them, but the sides of the tent were pegged down tight and no wind could blow in to disturb them, or the smoke that coiled in the air in rings. Dick stared very hard at the Russian, and Jenison stared hard at Dick, but neither said a word.

"You have been a very lucky man. Your luck, in sweeping the Caspian of Russian ships, was even more remarkable than your skill and daring. But you are a man of perspicacity; you must see—you must realize—that you can not go on forever defeating our regiments in detail, or winning such battles as last night's.

"Now, Mr. Anthony, at this moment is the opportunity to get from Russia the best terms possible!"

STILL Dick said nothing, and still Jenison, who scarcely could be said to know him yet, watched him with the trained eyes of a business-man. He and the Russian were both looking for a hint of greed in Dick's face. The Russian was being disappointed, and Jenison was feeling pleased.

"Money, Mr. Anthony, is a thing we all affect to despise, but when we get right down to ugly fact, money is the thing we all fight hardest for. Russia has money; she has unlimited supplies of it. You have none. Am I right?"

"So far as you've gone," said Dick, "you're almost exactly right." And the Russian gathered heart.

"Now, Mr. Anthony, you are aware that Russia is faced at this minute with a war on two fronts. She has to deal with Austria and Germany at once. Time is a factor in the situation. Every living man who is already mobilized ought to be hurried at once toward the Austrian or German frontier. You appreciate that, of course.

"Yet because of this rebellion of yours in Persia, no less than half a million men must be held under arms—ah—in this part of the world. Now the release of that half-million men is worth a price. Name your price. Let me conduct negotiations for you. I was sent down here with ten thousand men to finish you; since I have failed, I can serve my country best by making terms with you. Name your price, Mr. Anthony."

"My price is known," said Dick. "I have never made a secret of it."

"Then, I have been ill-informed," said the Russian with a twinge of disappointment. "Will you be good enough to tell me?"

"The freedom of Persia, neither more nor less for Persia—and——"

Dick hesitated, for his private honor was a subject that he hated to discuss.

"And?" said the Russian almost eagerly.

"And positive proof for myself of my identity! Neither more, nor less, for me!"

"But—Mr. Anthony—be practical! This talk about Persia is visionary—the matter is an international one. I——"

"You asked me my price and I have named it," said Dick rising. "I shall have to ask you for your parole."

"I give it."

Dick pointed to a side-table on which were pens and paper.

"Kindly write it."

The Russian did as he was asked and signed the few lines with a flourish. Dick pocketed the paper at the moment that a horse sploshed toward the tent outside.

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Its rider dismounted. The salaams of a Persian orderly left no doubt as to the newcomer's identity.

"COME in, Usbeg Ali!" shouted Dick, and a moment later the Afghan swaggered in, with the rain running from his beard and turban, and his high boots muddied to the top. His eyes burned with weariness, excitement, and lack of sleep, but his bearing was heroic.

"*Bahadur!*"

"Have you breakfasted?" asked Dick.

"Long since! I made a Russian cook it for me," he boasted with a sideways look at the General. "They are scattered, *bahadur!* There is not a troop of them left together! Ten of my men have ridden ahead of them, to tell the Persians what to do. They flee, but they run from the devil into Hell!"

"Have you called the pursuit off?"

"Aye; the horses are more tired than the men. They are resting, in a line spread east and west. Are the wires cut, sahib, the wires between here and Russia?"

"Ripped out by the roots!" said Dick. "I've ordered the poles burned."

"Good. Would God there were a way of knowing what move the Russians make, without disclosing ours!"

"There is," said Dick, looking at Jenison; but Usbeg Ali Khan looked straight in the eyes of the Russian General. Without a spoken word each knew that the other had in mind the Russian way of winning secrets from the tribes of Turkestan and Bokhara.

"You'd better get your man," said Dick; and Jenison, with a wry face at the empty coffee-pot, went out into the rain in search of one of his Americans.

"Give the General another tent," said Dick. "I have his parole. One sentry with orders not to let him out of sight will be enough."

Usbeg Ali Khan beckoned to the Russian, and the two went out together, the General leaving his sword behind. Dick tossed it in a corner and lay down on the cot to devour the Russian newspapers.

He found them beautifully censored. There were vague reports of Russian victories in Galicia and Prussia; there were columns of exhortation; there was mention of activity about the oil-wells, and comment on the fact that this war would be one of gasoline.

But there was no mention at all of the army of half a million men that Dick believed either ready to invade Persia down the east side of the Caspian, or else already on its way. And there was no mention of himself, Dick Anthony. He read the papers line by line, hurriedly, but missing nothing and making mental note of many things that others might have missed.

Then, with a frown at the necessity, he strode to the General's table to rummage among the papers there, and burst open the General's dispatch-box with the General's own sword. There were some obviously private papers that he sealed in an envelope unread; but there was a little book, and certain other documents, that he pocketed with a smile.

Outside, in rain that was running wheel-rut deep, and in mud that stuck to his heels, Usbeg Ali assigned the Russian General to a tent, placed a guard over him, and then—tired though he was—proceeded on foot to see for himself what provision Dick had made for his fighting infantry. There was no semblance of a camp, yet he could hear snores from every hand, and it was not until he peeped into a wagon that he understood.

THE Russian wagon-train, half-parked, half-straggling and evidently caught in panic in the night, lay as the Russians left it when Dick routed them. Wagons were here, there and everywhere; and under each of them, on anything that they could find to raise them from the wet, in each of them, on top of the high-piled commissariat, to leeward of each of them, beneath pilfered tent-flies or any other cover that would shed rain, Dick's dog-weary infantry lay snoring, warm and dry.

In other wagons, provided by the Russian Government for Cossacks in a hurry, soup was cooking. In and out among the wagons strode a giant—a big spludge of something, scarcely visible through the rain.

The giant caught sight of Usbeg Ali Khan and came hurrying toward him, flourishing a stick an inch thick. He raised the stick and did not lower it until he was less than ten feet away.

"I thought ye were one o' the rrrrank an' file," he grinned, pulling off his tam-o'-shanter to shake the rain out of it. "Mr. Dicky's orrrrders are tae lick the thunder

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out o' all except the cooks that dinna rest, an' tae lick the cooks if they du rest. I was about tae lick ye!"

Usbeg Ali chose to change the subject, for his dignity was dearer to him than his life. Besides, as second-in-command, he was Andry Macdougal's superior.

"What are they cooking?" he demanded. "Food such as the Russians eat?"

"Ah! Listen tae him! Suspeecion's the sperrit o' an Afghan! Dinna fash y'rsel'! There was a herd o' gude cattle wi' the Roosians, an' Mr. Dicky had the throats o' fifty o' them slit, so y'r releegious scrrrruples will na' be vexed. Man, ye luke weeary—y'r eyes burrrrn in the sockuts—be advised, and fin' a place to rest y'r banes a while. Listen! I'll gie ye mine until I want it—I've made me a gude nest!"

But Usbeg Ali laughed and shook his head.

"Allah made my bones to hold a soldier's back straight!" he answered. "They'll rest when convenient to me! What of the dead? This is the first time *he* has made no special disposition of the dead."

Men spoke of Dick as "he" and "him" on that campaign, since he had told them that his name was "No Name," and Andry was not in doubt for a moment as to who "he" was.

"Suspeecion again!" he snorted, shaking the rain out of his cap a second time. "Gang an' luke! Gang an' luke yonder, where the Roosian prisoners are!"

Andry pointed eastward, and Usbeg Ali Khan walked off in that direction without another word. There were not many Russian prisoners, he knew, for he and his horsemen had chased all they could find southward into Persia where the natives waited for them; still, he realized some men must have been taken among the wagons, and no doubt some had tried to bolt back along the road to Russia.

He came on about two hundred men sooner than he expected, employed at a task they were ill-fitted for after a long night's battle. With some picks and shovels, and a motley assortment of improvised tools that included even swords, they were digging two long trenches, twenty feet apart and parallel, that could have but one grim purpose. They were supervised by some of Dick's non-commissioned officers; and others of Dick's men, armed and very much alert, were in charge of other weary prisoners who carried in the dead of either side with strict impartiality and laid them in long lines beside each trench.

The trenches were half full of water, and the tools sucked stubbornly through gluey clay.

"How many dead?" asked Usbeg Ali.

"As yet we have found seven hundred lacking nine of our own men, sahib."

"And of the Russians?"

"More than a thousand, and that not nearly all. There lie many more not brought yet."

USBEG ALI muttered a Moslem prayer and turned away. As the morning light shone stronger through the downpour he could see Dick Anthony standing, bareheaded as always, at the entrance to the Russian General's tent. Dick's arm was stretched out, and a dozen men were listening to him in the rain with rapt attention.

"What is he ordering now?" the Afghan wondered. "He forgets nothing and nobody! He is a man who is twenty-five; and I, who am Allah knows how old, am a child in war beside him! Yet Allah made me no mean soldier! Praised be Allah!"

He saw the men depart their different ways, and then watched Dick walk to a wagon near at hand that was very closely guarded. There were ten men posted around it, with fixed bayonets. From the opposite direction Jenison was coming with one of his Americans. The wagon was a strange one, of a type that Usbeg Ali in all his soldier experience had never seen.

From the middle of it rose a jointed pole to a great height, and from that were suspended wires that seemed to have no conceivable use, nor connection with anything except the wagon. But Dick seemed to regard wagon and wires with interest, so Usbeg Ali hurried, curious as a child. He arrived face to face with Jenison.

"Here he is," said Jenison. "This man can make a wireless out of a corkscrew and an old clock. He can work any kind of telegraph blindfolded, upside down, and drunk."

"Is he sober now?" asked Dick.

Jenison pushed the man forward and he stood with the air of being glad of the opportunity to see Dick at close quarters.

"Know any Russian?" Dick asked.

"No."

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"Um-m-m! Look the machine over. See if it works, and let me know. Don't send a message of any kind. Listen for messages. Understand?"

The American nodded, and Dick watched him climb into the wagon.

"Now," said Dick, "come closer, Usbeg Ali. From what the General said to me at breakfast—you heard him, Jenison—it's clear to me that there's nothing in the way of troops ahead of us. These ten thousand were depended on to drive us eastward. And to make matters sure they've had nerve enough to send all they had. The ten thousand we have just beaten were all that stood between us and Baku; or he would not have been so anxious to bribe me."

Jenison nodded, and Usbeg Ali Khan stroked his wet beard reflectively.

"Come into my tent," said Dick, leading the way, and Usbeg Ali Khan thrust himself in front of Jenison, determined to assert his seniority and precedence at once to save confusion later.

Jenison gave way to him, but there was a flicker of amusement on his face that might have given the Afghan food for thought had he seen it.

The minute he got into the tent Dick produced a map and spread it on the table.

"Here's Tabriz," he said. "Practically all the mounted men the Russians had in Tabriz were with this force. I know that from prisoners. The few left behind to garrison the place won't amount to much. We can slip by Tabriz, between it and the Caspian. Then—d'you see—Baku lies naked at our feet, two forced marches beyond!"

"By the blood of God!" swore Usbeg Ali Khan.

"Looks like our meat!" grinned Jenison, rubbing his left ankle with his right heel as he always did when he felt jubilant or very much excited. He had rubbed a hole in his shoe the night before, when his gunners got the range and the shells exploded one after another at the spot intended.

"It means this," said Dick. "We can cut their communications east and west, and very likely paralyze them."

"How d'you mean, paralyze them?" Jenison demanded. "We're less than eight thousand, attacking millions. We can do damage—just damage. Let's do it, but what's the use of being over-sanguine."

"I said paralyze them!" answered Dick. "I meant it." He laid his finger on the map again, and they stooped on either side of him to see.

"Baku is——"

As he spoke, a Persian orderly came in, salaaming low.

"The Merikani in the wagon says the machine works," he announced.

"Tell him I'm coming!" Dick felt at his pocket to make sure the General's little book was there. "Go and sleep, you two men! Talk to you later!"

II

WHATEVER it was—instinct, intuition—it surely was not what the world calls knowledge—that assured Dick Anthony he had a clear, straight road to Russia's vitals, it was confirmed step by step, point by point as the day wore on, and his swift-thinking mind pieced circumstance to incident and made an accurate conjecture of the whole.

The wireless-apparatus worked, as Jenison had prophesied it would. Sober as a judge, since there was no whisky anywhere, the most ingenious telegraphist that even the United States had ever grown too hot to hold imagined himself drunk as he took down letter after letter but completely failed to string them into words. Dick, sitting beside him in the wagon, checked off the letters and put pencil-dots at intervals, silent except for deep, steady breathing.

"Make head or tail of it?" the expert asked.

"Yes," said Dick.

When the instrument quit talking for a while, Dick drew out the General's little book and assured himself that the system of dots meant something. There was a page at the back of the book that dealt with nothing except dots. Then he sat on the wagon-tail with his legs in the rain but his body and hands inside, and started to decode the inside secrets of the most secret bureaucracy on earth.

"Where are you? Where are you? Where are you?" was the first part of the message, repeated a dozen times until apparently the operator at the other end grew tired of asking.

"Send out something indefinite," said Dick over his shoulder. "Send some word

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that'll let them know they're in touch without giving anything away."

"Easy!" said the expert; and he sent a signal that is part of the international code, and so well known that armies use it in their casual conversation. Instantly the tune was taken up from the other end again.

This is Baku. Where are you? Where are you? Why are the overland wires down? What is happening? Why don't you answer?

"Can you make it seem," said Dick, "as if we can receive but not send?"

"Sure," said the expert, wondering whether Dick had brandy in his tent and whether he would be likely to reward good service with a bottle of it.

Eying him sharply from the wagon-tail, Dick was thanking his stars that Jenison had such a man in his outfit. Incidentally he registered a mental vow that the man should drink water or go dry until the campaign ended.

After about five minutes more of frantic questioning the tale from the other end began to shape itself into the form of coded orders, repeated over and over again for the sake of certainty.

The Princess Olga Karageorgovich must be rounded up and held. Find out from her where the papers are. Don't trust her again on any conditions, or for any reason. Send her back here under close guard, unless——

A word followed that seemed to have no meaning, although Dick searched the code-book thoroughly. He pressed an arm against a bulky package underneath his shirt, and seemed to find pleasure in it.

"Send some sort of a fluttering answer," he said. "Let 'em feel sure we're listening."

Baku soon resumed in code:

Conditions on Prussian and Austrian fronts are serious. It is essential now that the men with whom you are supposed to act in concert be withdrawn for use in Europe. Not possible otherwise to mobilize fast enough to meet conditions. You must work alone. No force will invade Persia from the east side of the Caspian. Press forward, but confine your efforts to recovery of the stolen plans for our invasion, because owing to present conditions should Great Britain protest your presence in Persia you must be withdrawn. Above all things get those plans. Try to trap Anthony. If the Princess has the plans already, get them from her. In any case get rid of Anthony, and get the plans.

DICK worked with the code-book, pencil and a piece of paper, until he had an answer coded to his satisfaction. It was a risky game to play, to send an answer, for he had no means of knowing what peculiarities of style the General might have, and to have aroused suspicion would have been to throw away nine-tenths of his advantage.

But he decided the risk was worth it.

Not knowing what he sent, the expert at the key flashed back to Baku—

Please reconsider.

The answer to that was immediate—

Impossible!

Dick sent back, after an interval of worrying at the code—

Then reinforce me with ten thousand men.

Evidently the captured General was a man whom people humored as a rule, for they tendered him an explanation at some length.

Impossible! All troops available are being rushed westward. Speed is the great factor. The sooner you get the plans and finish Anthony, the better, because your ten thousand men would be very useful. Hurry. Let Persia wait until afterward. Can probably be made subject of ultimate peace negotiations. But get the plans and finish Anthony before you hurry back.

That seemed to be all Baku had to say for the time being, for the expert reported nothing further coming through.

"Stay there then and write down whatever does come without answering," commanded Dick. "Send for me if they begin any rigmarole."

"By the way—" said the expert.

"What?" asked Dick.

"My nerves are in a rotten state, and I'd like some brandy."

"Oh," said Dick, and he walked away abruptly.

He met Jenison, sore-eyed from lack of sleep, heading for a tent that somebody had pulled out of the loot and pitched for him near Dick's.

"That wireless-man of yours——" said Dick.

"Yes—what about him?"

"Has just asked me for brandy."

"Don't give it him."

"Exactly, but before you go to sleep please set your next best man to watch him. Promise both of them a drumhead court-martial if I can smell drink on the breath of either!"

"Good!" said Jenison, who knew his men and how they should be handled.

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DICK went back to his newspapers, and to rummage among the General's belongings. He found and studied the General's campaign-map that showed where the roads were, and the wells, and what forage and provisions might be expected at places on the road. He compared that map with his stolen, secret one—the map that betrayed intended treachery and that Russia now had sent ten thousand men to find. Then he sent for a prisoner who had talked already, and asked him again a string of questions whose gist the man did not understand.

The fellow stood at attention, dropping his eyes when Dick looked straight at him, shifting from one foot to another and looking about him wildly whenever Dick looked away.

Rain swished and drummed on the tent; wind whistled through the ropes and kept the fly snapping. There was no more light than filtered dimly through wet canvas, nor any other sound inside the tent than their two voices—Dick's insistent, and the other's sullen and afraid—except the *drip-drip-drip* of a tiny stream of water on the table.

"Who told you there are no more sotnias —no infantry, no artillery—marching south behind this cavalry-brigade of yours?"

Dick spoke in Russian, now that there was nobody to hear except the Russian; his unaccustomed tongue had trouble with the consonants, but the man did not need to ask him to repeat his question. There was something about Dick Anthony that made him understandable to any one, in any tongue, when he wanted to be understood.

"It is known. They all know."

"Who know?"

"They. The others. There were half a million men held these months long, east of the Caspian; it was known they were for Teheran, and for God knew what beyond. There were mutinies—not big ones, but many little ones, and there was grumbling all the time. None wanted to invade Persia, for what had Persia done? We of the army are Cossacks, Turkomans, Armenians; what grudge bear we against the Persians? We did not want to go."

Dick nodded. It was not the first time he had found out that the Russian soldier would prefer minding his own business if his rulers would let him.

"Then came news of war with Germany! Then, as if God had touched Russia with His finger—so—and turned her into gold, all was changed in an eye-flash. What had been mutiny was discipline. What had been sloth and hanging back was eagerness. What had been many minds and many purposes was one. Russia is one now, and we all prayed that we might fight for her. Men forgot Persia. We prayed for leave to march westward."

Dick nodded, taking care not to look directly at the man, for fear of disconcerting him. Sideways, from under lowered lids, he was studying more than the psychology of serfdom; he was weighing the man's words; he was sifting word by word, hunting for the truth. And in the end he rejected not one word of all that the man said, for he knew truth when he met it. Like every other Russian, and in spite of the ruling caste, this man loved Russia with the whole of his peasant heart, and knew but one grief at that moment.

"There was nothing printed—no news; yet word went around that every man was needed, and we came. I am a reservist. My time is nearly up. I have nine children to provide for, and I am a widower. But I came.

"God will protect my children, so be I fight for Russia. But this—this southward march—this is not Russia's business! It is no wonder we are defeated in a night—it is the hand of God! The half-million received orders to march westward against Germany. Only we ten thousand—we miserable men—were sent down here. None were to follow. We were to hurry on some secret business, and hurry back.

"We are beaten. God willed it. Now nothing matters. There are no more who follow us. The troops all march westward, by road and train, on foot, on horse, and in motor-cars."

DICK'S face moved slightly. He gave the same impression that a hound does that hears the almost inaudible.

"Motor-cars?" he asked.

"Aye! God knows where they come from. None knew there were so many in all Russia. Every sort and kind of motor-car, loaded with men. More men go by motor than by train, and men say it is so all over Russia."

"Then, if I retire into Persia, will Russia not send an army after me?"

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"Why? Men have forgotten Persia! The road leads westward. Every man whose feet and heart are good goes westward. There would be rebellion if an order came to march into Persia!"

"Very well," said Dick. "Here is some money for you."

He counted gold from the General's cash-box, and gave it to him. The man laid the money on the table and burst into tears.

"Let me go! Let me go and fight for Russia!" he demanded.

"You shall," said Dick.

The man stared open-mouthed.

"You shall go with me."

"You! You? You will fight for Russia?"

"Is England Russia's enemy?" asked Dick.

"Nay. Men say—I have heard—England and France and Russia——"

"I am from England."

"Then——"

"It is time," said Dick, "for you to return to the guard-tent. Can you hold your tongue?"

"Surely. None better."

Dick laughed. For a man who had just laid bare every single secret that he knew this fellow had a strange conceit of himself.

"If you talk in the guard-tent," Dick assured him, "you shall not go back to Russia. You shall be hounded into Persia along the road the others took!"

The man laid a work-calloused hand across his own mouth.

"I am silent on all points," he said, "until I have leave to speak!"

"What is your name?" asked Dick, taking a pen as if about to make a note. But the man did not answer, and Dick could not coax another word from him. Satisfied, he raised his voice into a shout that carried against the raging wind and rain as far as the orderly who waited twenty yards away.

"Take him to the guard-tent, and have him watched closely," he commanded when the orderly appeared.

Then he pulled on the military-cloak that Andry had robbed for him from the man who plundered it from the body of a Cossack officer, and set out, face to the rain, for a distant wagon around which a guard was set as if it had been another wireless-plant.

On his way he sighted Andry and waved to him. The big man turned and followed into the wind, leaning forward like a gnarled tree; something around his neck streamed out behind him like a storm-wrenched bough. The two were side by side when they came to the solitary wagon, and the guard presented arms. Dick stopped, and Andry strode closer to peer in.

"Ye may come!" he said tersely over his shoulder to Dick.

DICK first, and then Andry after him, climbed into the wagon by a wheel, and sat down on some grain-bags opposite a plump, pale woman who sat propped up on a litter. She smiled at Andry first and signaled to him with her eyes before she greeted Dick.

"I want you to remember," Dick began.

She nodded, for since Marie Mouquin had let curiosity get the better of her, and had taken the consequence in the form of a knife-wound, she had studied reticence. As women of her type may always be depended on to do, she had gone from one extreme to its opposite.

She had detested Andry once; so now she loved him with all the fervor of her French heart. She had always been garrulous; so now she imitated Dick and grudged words, especially when first spoken to. She had been faithful to the Princess Olga Karageorgovich, in spite of cruelty and crime; so now there was no limit to her disregard for the ties that had been. She nodded three times running.

"When you first saw me in Egypt—" Dick leaned toward her and spoke slowly—"the Princess was plotting a rebellion in Egypt against British rule. Was she doing that on behalf of Russia or on her own account?"

Marie smiled.

"On behalf of Russia," she replied.

"Are you sure? Positive? Had you any proof?"

"She has no money of her own—not one sou," said Marie Mouquin. "Yet in Egypt she gave away more than a million roubles. Is that not proof?"

"Was she playing Russia's game or her own, then, when she tricked me into landing in Russia instead of Turkey?"

"Both. She wanted you. She used to lie awake all night and sob for you. But she knew that she could only win you by using you for Russia's ends, and so making use of all Russia's resources to compel you."

"Did she invent this scheme to invade Persia?"

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"No."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite sure. But she knew of the plan. And the idea of driving you into Persia, to become an outlaw and so give excuse for the invasion, was all hers. She stipulated that afterward you should be hers—her reward—to do with as she pleased. They trusted her. They let her have authentic copies of the maps and plans. It was only after I stole the plans for the invasion and sent them to Andry that they lost confidence in her and her downfall began—or so I think."

"Are you sure, beyond any doubt or possibility of doubt, that Russia had this half-million men ready to invade Persia? Are you sure the plan was not just a plan, just a scheme concocted by the Princess, that she intended but that the Russian Government did not intend?"

"You have the plans," said Marie Mouquin. "You have seen them."

"But I haven't seen the half-a-million army!" answered Dick. "Are you sure it was meant for Persia?"

"Mr. Anthonee, I *know!*" Now it was Marie who leaned forward and spoke slowly, earnestly. "All those months long I lived with her. Often I shared her bed. I ate with her. I wrote her letters. I was secretary, maid, confidante, stalking-horse, scapegoat, everything. Should I not know?

"Why, I have spoken with the men who came to her from beyond the Atrak River and begged her give orders to advance. They told me the men were mutinous from inactivity. They begged me to persuade the Princess to give orders. It was all in her hands then. Mr. Anthonee——"

She leaned further forward, so that Andry held an arm out to restrain her. Then she continued:

"You think you are unfortunate. You call yourself 'No Name' because Russia took your name away. I assure you—I swear to you that she, and only she, is answerable for all your trouble! It was she who advised the Russian Government to cable London an account of your death and burial at sea. What lies has she, or any one, been telling you now that you doubt at the last minute?"

Andry cleared his throat with a noise like a dog quarreling about a bone.

"I dinna doot 'at Jezebel was a lovelier lass, an' mair respectable than she!" he growled.

DICK did not answer. Nor did he doubt. He had the gift of seeing things in better perspective and with broader view than most men. It did not trouble his red head if people mistook his infinite pains, his care in sifting and resifting evidence, his fairness and honesty, for doubt. He would have liked to believe that England's ally was honest; but he did not believe it. He was more sure now than ever that the half-million army had been meant in the first instance for a hand that should reach out and seize the Persian Gulf.

He asked no more questions, made no more remarks. He left the covered wagon as he had entered it, in silence and without excuse, vaulting over the end into a pool of liquid ooze and walking ahead regardless of the rain and of the fact that his cloak was all undone.

He did not know whether he was wet or dry. He had gone a hundred yards before he noticed that Andry Macdougal was not with him. Then he turned as if shot, and his strange strong voice, that could carry through the din of battle when he raised it, blared through the storm as no bugle ever did.

"Andry! Come out of that! Come along!"

One foot at a time, and slowly, the giant let his six-feet-five of beef and bone descend to mother earth. It was not the mud nor the rain that made him reluctant, nor the wind that made him look sheepish as he came.

"Go and sleep!" commanded Dick. "But listen, first! That's an honest woman. An honest woman with an army—with an army that began by being more than one-half bandit—is in a predicament. I'll have you understand, my man, that I'll thrash the lout who gives any one excuse for gossiping about her. Understand me?"

"Aye!"

"Until we can find a minister who can marry you, you'll take no liberties!"

"Aye. I ken. Mr. Dicky—"

"Eh?"

"I apologize."

But Dick had forgotten him and the incident. He never could bother himself with what was done with, nor clutter up his mind with useless memories, even for a second. He was striding forward with the rain behind him, thinking of the last part of the game that lay ahead.

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HE PASSED Usbeg Ali Khan on his way, heavy-eyed now, waiting in the rain for word with him.

"*Bahadur*——"

"Go and sleep. You need it."

"To hear is to obey. But——"

"Go and sleep!"

Dick passed on, as if to hear were really to obey, but the Afghan hurried after him.

"*Bahadur*——"

"Is the camp safe?" Dick asked him.

"Aye, but——"

"Are the pickets placed and under cover?"

"Aye, but——"

"Go and sleep!" said Dick, turning on his heel and striding forward.

So Usbeg Ali Khan, gentleman adventurer of swarthy skin and gallant heart, went to a nest his man had made for him between some grain-bags and slept as adventurers may do occasionally when their ten-man task is done.

But Dick did not sleep. Not even the wish to sleep occurred to him, though he had fought and won a battle through a long, wet night, after a long day's march with men who had to be watched each mile of the way. Great men have the trick of waking when Dame Fortune's stakes are on the table and the game is on. He lay, hour after hour, on the Russian General's bed, with his muddy boots on the General's private blanket, and thought out the problem point by point.

It seemed to him that Russia had not wanted the war in Europe. The idea that England and France might have wanted war drew a laugh from him. It began to look to him as if England, France and Russia had been forced into a fight quite unexpectedly, and therefore as if disclosure of the ugly facts about Russia's previously contemplated treachery would be disconcerting. Russia, it seemed to him, would be likely to pay a big price to keep back those facts.

"For the sake of England and France," he said to himself, "I'll save Russia's face for her. But she shall pay the price to Persia and to me in full, and in advance! Who sups with Russia, Richard Anthony, sups with a long spoon or goes hungry, and we're hungry enough—too hungry. We'll use the spoon!"

He arose and opened the tent-flap an inch or two.

"Call me in four hours' time exactly!" he ordered the man on guard.

Then he lay on the General's bed, and was asleep in less than thirty seconds, sleeping like a little child.

III

DRESSED as a Persian woman, on a horse that Dick had given her, carryng a steel box that Dick had let her take, the Princess Olga Karageorgovich spurred into Persia past a line of Russian fugitives who fled from Usbeg Ali's cavalry. She ignored Russians and Usbeg Ali's men alike, for the Russians were supposed to be her own, and Dick's leave to be gone was passport enough to protect her from recapture.

There were two exactly parallel deep wrinkles on her brow, that changed her face, as by a miracle, from captivating charm to freezing repulsiveness. Under them her violet eyes glowed sullenly, and her parted lips, that showed two even rows of exquisitely modeled teeth, were hard and straight. From behind she still may have looked like a woman to be loved and followed, though a man who noticed first the laboring of her horse and her disregard of the beast's necessity might have reached a different conclusion; from in front there was no mistaking her as some one to avoid.

Not that she sought company. She turned in the saddle to tongue-lash runaways who dared keep too close to her, and those ahead hurried away to left and right to give her the road and avoid the whip she wielded.

When, before many miles, there was a choice of two roads and one of them curved eastward toward the Caspian she took that one, to be out of the path of the pursued. And once alone—once in a hollow where she was not likely to be seen—she watered her horse, and hobbled him to graze, tying the rein cleverly around his fore-leg.

She neither drank, nor rested. Going straight to the hardest, sharpest rock in sight she toiled for twenty minutes like a mason, trying to burst the steel box, until her knuckles bled and she sank to the earth exhausted. She fell asleep there, with her forehead resting on the box and her lips muttering either a prayer or imprecation.

The time was not long gone when she would not have troubled herself to open the box, provided only that she had been sure

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its contents were intact. Then, when she was Russia's Secret Government's first representative and knew her instructions all by heart, her mind had been only occupied about the practise of the plan.

Now, since Russia had done with her and Dick Anthony would have none of her, it was her business to find out just what she had left with which to bargain. A sickening thought, half-dream, occurred to her as she moved to ease her limbs, and in an instant she was wide awake again, hammering the rock.

Why had Dick Anthony dared let her have that box? If it contained, as she thought it did, plans and a map that would prove the Russian Government a traitor to its ally, Dick could have made a better bargain with it than to toss it to her as the price of riddance.

He could have bought Russian citizenship, a commission in the Russian army, and a million roubles with the contents of that box, and he must have known it. Yet he had let her take it. She recalled his words as she knelt with the box raised above her head, poised for a downward crash against the rock with all her strength.

"You may take it as the price of your departure. I will bribe you with it!"

The words stuck in her craw the more uncomfortably because she had accepted the bribe, and because the thought kept coming to her that Dick did not deal in bribes as a rule. She grew convinced that there was a trick somewhere, that she had been fooled, that Dick had been laughing at her when he let her go with what she thought such a prize of prizes. She doubled and redoubled her efforts to smash the box open; but it had been pressed at the Russian arsenal from armor-steel, and she did no more than chip the lacquer from off the outside.

AT LAST, sobbing from her effort and from rage, she caught the horse again and mounted. She was not in such a hurry now. She did not flog so desperately, nor lean forward in the saddle. Nor did she continue on the road to Persia.

At a slow amble she rode back toward Dick's camp, avoiding Russian fugitives as much as possible, and refusing to have word at all with those who managed to throw themselves in her way and ask advice or orders. She rode for several hours, until she was brought to a stand at last by one of Usbeg Ali's outposts.

"The other way!" the man ordered. "None pass this way! Back into Persia!"

But Dick had forgotten when he gave her the box that for a month past it had held his valuables and had been carried by an orderly who treated it as sacred. The man had magnified his office until Dick's army grew to regard the box as some sort of almost-magic talisman, and now it rested in front of her, on the pommel of the saddle.

She raised it, almost without thinking. The man saluted at once, and quick as lightning she divined the reason. She held it up high, and the man made way for her. Since long before history was written the caliph's ring, or the emir's jewel, or some other article known to belong to royalty has been an unchallengeable passport throughout Persia and the greater part of Asia.

She rode on unmolested. It was not until after a wordy argument with a dozen of his fellows and an officer that the man spurred after her, and past her, and carried word of her coming through the rain to Dick's camp. And even then the orderly outside his tent refused to wake Dick until his stipulated four hours' sleep was over.

So the Princess sat in the rain and waited for him—a wet, lone woman, on a dispirited-looking horse—and Dick, awake at once when the orderly called him, strode out unexpectant and met her face to face.

"I have come to ask mercy!" she said instantly, speaking before he could say anything. "Is there any mercy in this camp? There is none outside."

"What do you mean?" demanded Dick.

"Mean?"

She held the box out. Then she tossed it to his feet, and for a moment he supposed that she had found some way of opening it already, and had discovered his trick. He turned it over with his toe, and it was only then that the truth dawned on him, and with it a new idea.

"Nothing less than dynamite would open that!" she said. "What use is it to me? How do I know what is inside it?"

"And she wouldn't dare use dynamite, of course," thought Dick, "for fear of destroying the contents. What use do you propose to make of the contents?" he asked her.

"Sell them! Sell them, of course! Sell them to the British! They are worth more to Russia, but Russia would bargain with

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me and then send me to Siberia! I will sell them to the British, in return for protection!"

"Where do you propose to make your bargain with the British Government?" Dick asked her.

"Where else but at Teheran? I might get through to Teheran, and there is nowhere else to turn."

"I will give you a pass and an escort to Teheran," said Dick, "provided when you get there you will give the box and its contents to the British Minister. I shall add a letter to what is already in the box, and something else. In the letter I shall say that you will prove my identity!"

Their eyes met. She remembered a former occasion when he had offered to regard her as a friend if she would ride to Teheran and prove him Dick Anthony of Arran, as only she could have done. She remembered his scorn when she refused him. Then she had been at the zenith of her power and believed that she could wear Dick down into submission to her; now she was a suppliant for mercy, and her eyes fell in front of his.

"I surrender!" she said quietly, and then she dismounted into a foot of slimy mud.

DICK shouted for his orderly, and sent the man running to bring Usbeg Ali Khan and Jenison, keeping the Princess waiting in the rain for ten more minutes until his witnesses were there. Usbeg Ali Khan, when he came at last on a horse that needed forcing into the downpour, evidently thought he had come to see an execution.

"Which is it to be—hanging, shooting, or burning alive?" he asked pleasantly.

But Dick led the way into his tent and sent another orderly hurrying off to the women's part of the camp where the wounded were being cared for.

"Get some kind of a change of clothes for her!" he ordered. "Get them, d'you hear me! Don't dare come back without them. Then see that she has a tent, or some place in which to change!"

Dick laid the box, all muddied, on the table and produced its key. He opened it, and the Princess gasped. Usbeg Ali grinned.

"Blank paper, and a few out-of-date muster-rolls, you see! Nothing much to bargain with!"

Dick was looking at her eye to eye across the table; the pupils of his eyes dilated to make the most of the dim light.

"Then you cheated me! Then you tricked me!"

"I tricked you. Yes."

"Bah! A bandit's trick! A trick for the sake of trickery! And to what purpose? To get rid of me? I would have gone in any case!"

Usbeg Ali laughed aloud, and Jenison looked uncomfortable. He was trying to combine American ideas on the treatment of lone women with his other, equally pronounced and soldierly notions about spies and treachery. The man in him told him to be sorry for the Princess; experience and intuition bade him caution Dick. He compromised by holding his tongue and looking away when the Princess glanced at him.

"There shall be no trick this time," said Dick, emptying the box by turning it upside down. "Perhaps you recognize this?"

The Princess nodded and her fingers twitched as she recognized a letter that had been enclosed with the map that she proposed to offer to the British. It was a letter of four closely written pages, explaining much that was on the map. It would be enough to interest the British Government, and to excite its curiosity to know more, but it would not be enough in itself to convict the Russian Government. Dick put it in the box.

Then he took pen and paper, and wrote a short letter on one sheet that he showed to nobody. Signed, but unsealed, he put it in the box with the Russian letter, and holding the box up in full view of the Princess he locked it, putting the key back in his own pocket.

"Now," he said, "I'll send this key by a man whom I can trust to the British Minister at Teheran. The man shall leave within an hour. You—" he looked straight in the Princess' eyes—"shall leave for Teheran at dawn tomorrow with an escort of ten men, and you shall carry the box.

"If you can satisfy the British Minister that you are the Princess Olga Karageorgovich, and that I am Richard Anthony of Arran, you will be able to make terms with him I think. You may tell him he will find me at Baku! Let me have one of your Afghans, Usbeg Ali, to carry the key, and ten dependable men to ride with her at dawn. Thanks.

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"Now, is her tent ready? Are dry clothes in it for her? What kind of clothes? Persian? Very well, that can't be helped. Understand me, Usbeg Ali, I don't want to see her again. You see to it that she and her escort leave at daybreak!"

"She shall leave or die!" growled the Afghan.

As the Princess walked out she nodded to Dick familiarly, ignored Jenison as a person of no importance, and laughed at Usbeg Ali Khan; but she followed the Afghan to the tent assigned to her, and once she was inside, he set a guard closely spaced around it.

IV

DICK ANTHONY'S determination—that was summed up from his point of view by the motto of his family: "Agree with thine adversary quickly!"—was doubled now, and a fire burned in him that was contagious. More seemed within his reach than met any eye but his. He had set Persia first and himself last, and would keep that order in his mind until his last pledge was fulfilled, but he was no less zealous because his own reward loomed large beyond a cloud of difficulties.

Difficulties! It needs difficulties to bring out the manhood of such men as Dick. A good horse is not wasted when the course is long and the going bad; nor is a good man thrown away if matched against the almost overwhelming. But encouragement is good in either case. Having nothing of the demagogue about him, nor more of the visionary than a man of practise should have, Dick did not dream that Persia would be other than ungrateful to the end. But he saw his own reward ahead, entirely apart from Persia and her destinies; and the cause of Persia grew terrifically more ascendant in proportion.

"You look," said Jenison, stopping him on his way across the camp, "like a boy who is going to eat pie!"

"I am," said Dick, and Jenison stood still in front of him blocking the way that he might study Dick's face and bearing better.

Rather fat, muddied to the hips, troubled a little by his rheumatism, Jenison looked exactly the part of a gallant gentleman who is game in spite of the odds, and means to see the thing through to a finish. His smile was glued on, so to speak; he kept it there as the gentlemen adventurers would wear their ladies' gloves in other days.

But looking at things from a commonsense American business point of view (as in his very nature he could not help doing), he could see very little percentage in a raid into Russia with eight thousand men and six guns. There might be fun in it, perhaps, but little profit. Besides, since the fight of the night before they were running very short indeed of ammunition.

"Punkin pie!" he said, grinning up at Dick.

"I never tasted that kind," Dick assured him. "But I get your meaning. Yes. I'm coming into my own at last."

Jenison looked from left to right and all around him. There was none to overhear, for all the men and officers were busy under Dick's orders, and Dick was crossing from one shelter to another to inspect. He looked back, straight into the rain at Dick's eyes.

"I've only known you a few days," he said, "but I'm interested. I'd like to know what your idea of the ultimate attainment is. Tell me and I'll keep it secret, if you say so."

"A commission in the British Army," Dick said quietly.

"A commission—in the British Army! *You?*"

"Why not?"

"Is *that* all the graft you hope to get out of this?"

"It's all one man can carry!" answered Dick.

"And you expect to get a commission in the British Army by invading the territory of England's most important ally, at the exact moment when a set-back to either of them would be most inconvenient?"

"If you put it that way, yes," smiled Dick.

"It's the wildest idea of blackmail I ever heard of! You're an original!"

THE rain streamed from Dick's hair down his face and shoulders, for he never would wear a hat, but he made no offer to move; and Jenison, smothered in a seaman's sou'wester and oilskins, was too absorbed in the study of him to know any longer whether it was raining or not.

"D'you mean to tell me," Jenison demanded, "that you cooked all this up—this

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rebellion, this expedition, all this business —for the sake of a commission in the British Army?"

Dick laughed at him.

"No," he said. "I left England with a commission in the Territorials. Couldn't get anything better because an uncle of mine took steps to prevent me. I ran into this affair by accident—to me; it was design on Russia's part. Never dreamed of a war in Europe; wouldn't have left home for a kingdom if I'd thought there was the remotest chance of it. Now, if there's anything can keep me from getting back to Europe with my man Andry I'd be interested to know what it is. When we've cleaned this tangle up I'll try for my commission."

"How?"

"Does it ever happen to you," said Dick, "in business, for instance, that you can see in your own mind how you're going to do a thing—exactly how everything is going to break—and yet you wouldn't trust yourself to put it into words?"

"Often," said Jenison.

"There you have it, then," said Dick, making a move to pass on.

So Jenison stepped aside into a puddle and stood in it to stare after Dick, who strode across camp like the god of war, indifferent to everything but the end he aimed at and its means.

"The fools ought to have kept him and *made* him join the army. They'd have won the war by now!" swore Jenison.

He went on his way then, over toward his mud-smeared guns, with a smile on his lips that was less mechanical, and the little crowd of English and Americans whom he had brought from Teheran detected the change in him, gathered around him, and teased him for information.

"All I know is that we start at midnight," he told them, then added, to the extent of his own scant information: "There'll be a small mounted advance-guard under Usbeg Ali Khan. Then we follow with the guns and a spare team for each gun to help haul 'em through the worst places; then the infantry, and a rear-guard of mounted men again. How much ammunition have we got, boys?"

"Ten rounds a gun," said somebody.

"Is that all?"

"Every ounce!"

"——!" said Jenison.

DICK passed the tent that had been given the Princess with a frown on his face that he could never quite refrain from at mere thought of her. What hurt him, strangely enough, was not her desperate villainy nor the months of misery that she had brought on him, but the fact that she made it impossible for him to respect her as he wanted to respect all women. His one weak point was his too punctilious chivalry. Even now, when she called to him from between the tent-flaps, he turned to listen to her and could find a smile of courtesy.

"Mr. Anthony!"

His smile grew sunnier, for of late she had always called him by his first name. He recalled her "I surrender" of an hour ago, and felt almost friendly.

"It is very cold and wet. I am only a woman, and I have been exposed to more rain than is good for me. Is there no brandy —perhaps even vodka—in the camp? May I have some, please? Otherwise, I don't think I will ever get to Teheran with your message!"

Across Dick's mind there flashed recollection of a wagon-load of vodka, part of the loot of the Russian camp, that he had ordered kept under rigid guard because he had use of his own for it.

He went to the wagon, made one of the sentries pull out a small cask of the stuff, and, because there was no sense in leaving a broached cask to tempt the men, carried the whole thing to the Princess' tent. It was marked on the outside in Russian "Alcohol 96%."

"Help yourself!" he smiled, rolling the small cask into her tent, and noticing as the flap fell back how meager were the comforts provided for her. She looked cold and miserable, and there was no bed in the tent at all.

He went off at once and ordered a Russian officer's cot-mattress taken to her, with half a dozen plundered Russian blankets. He had food sent to her. And because the close ring of sentries set by Usbeg Ali irked his sense of what was due a woman, he ordered them away and left only one to watch her.

Then he went off about the thousand and one different things that call for the attention of a man who would lead eight thousand on a raid. One of the first things was to have all the rest of the vodka spilled into

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whatever shallow receptacles were to be found, and every marching man of the force was made to file by and bathe his feet in it. Those who wanted to were allowed to rub it on their stomachs. Then came the turn of the horses, and what was left when their tired muscles had been rubbed with it was poured out in the mud.

The camp became like an ants' nest for activity; and when the rain ceased at last and the clean, sweet air called out the fighting-men from under cover to fill their lungs and stretch themselves, there was too much commotion and too much hilarity for minor things to be much noticed. Certainly nobody noticed a long slit in the back of the Princess' tent, and a finger that rose and fell up and down in what might have been unpremeditated sequence of short and long strokes.

Nobody noticed that the tent assigned to the Russian General, that was back to back to hers and a hundred yards away, had a slit in the back of it too, or that another finger did very much the same thing in that slit.

Nor did it seem to be anybody's business that the sentry on duty by the Princess' tent should go close to the fluttering flap and be given a cupful of strong vodka. True, he was a Mohammedan and not supposed to drink it. True, several saw him and as many envied him. But there is a schoolboy *camaraderie* among campaigners that forbids them to tell tales about less delinquencies than treason; and there is an easy equivocation current among the less strict Moslems that says "spirits are not wine." The Prophet forbade wine, but said nothing about vodka.

And vodka is generous stuff, when a man has not tasted spirits for a year or two. It warms up the cockles of his heart, lets out the reefs in his imagination, and makes him see logic that would otherwise seem treason to him.

The sentry loved Dick, as a good soldier may love and reverence his officer. The vodka told him to be like Dick, if he could. And Dick's chivalry—the lengths that Dick would go to oblige a woman—were a subject of everlasting fable and exaggeration among his men. A second helping of raw spirit, passed to him by a slim hand through the opening of the tent, opened the man's ears and made mere words sound like the whispering of angels.

"Would he take a message? In the name of Allah the Compassionate, why not?"

WITHIN five minutes the General was in possession of a scribbled note; and within five minutes more the Princess had her answer, scribbled across the lines of the same sheet of paper. Both messages were long, and detailed.

Then, would the sentry not be pleased to let a lady by? Had the sentry not been given vodka? Was the vodka not excellent? Would he like some more? Surely she would come back! She would come back within ten minutes. Yes, she could see Dick Anthony now, examining the captured Russian cattle; surely she would be back before he had finished; it would take him thirty minutes more at least to complete his inspection at that rate, and she would be back in less than fifteen. Meanwhile, here was a third cup of good vodka, and if the sentry would step aside for just one second—so——

She was gone—a veiled Persian woman slipping by the shadows in a camp where a woman of any kind was sacred. She had vodka—lots of it—in the gourd they had provided for her drinking-water, hidden under her long veil.

Luck, of the most amazing kind, seemed to shadow the Princess always in the inception of her plans and the beginning of their evolution. It was nothing less than luck that made Jenison relieve the guard on the wireless-wagon with another man who was half-stupid from being aroused from heavy sleep.

He had taken up his duty about five minutes before the Princess came, and was still wondering sleepily whether Jenison meant the talk about strong drink to be a joke. Where was the strong drink, anyhow? And if there were any, who would be the guy—the thirsty, thirsty guy—who got the first crack at it? Eh? And how much would there be left in that event for anybody else, unless there were an awful lot of booze?

His reflections were not interrupted, rather they were led gently on by the smell of strong drink, and at that a new smell that he did not know. And then from beside the wagon-wheel a cup was held out to him by a Persian woman, who said in very pretty broken English—

"Wid Meester Anthonee's compleemens."

Now, was not that thoughtful and decent

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of Dick? Who wouldn't fight to a finish for a commander who remembered the men on guard in that way? He reached for the cup, swallowed its contents, and allowed the veiled lady to fill it again. The second cup made him cough, and his head swam so that he did not ask for a third; he was satisfied to lean on his rifle and wonder at the world at large.

He did not watch to see which way the woman went, nor did he care which way; and he was not listening very carefully. He was thinking of Dick Anthony—wondering why he called himself "of Arran," and "No Name" — wondering what color Dick's amazing eyes were, and whether Dick was as strong physically as men said he was and as he seemed to be. He was wondering, too, what he would do if he had had Dick's personal charm and ability to make men follow him.

He was not thinking at all of the wagon behind him, and he was not quite sure how many people ought to be in it, anyhow. He knew it was a wireless-plant, and—oh yes, the fellow in charge of it must not drink—souse, most likely—pity some fellows *would* souse at the wrong time. Now *he* . . .

THROUGH the slit in the covered front of the wagon a slim hand, followed by the shapeliest arm the wireless-expert had ever seen, held out a cup of vodka—96%. It smelled like the back-room in a Bowery saloon, and for a moment the sleepy expert thought that he was dreaming. But the cup came forward, and the smell increased. He held out his hand and touched the cup—took it—swallowed the contents — coughed — gasped—and passed it back for more.

"Pinch me when it's over!" he said in a level voice. "But not until it's over!"

It was not without reason that Dick had hesitated when Jenison first came to him with an outfit of fifty men, half of them white. He had not doubted Jenison; he had read him, understood him, liked him, trusted him, and shaken hands. It had been Jenison's following that gave him pause, and the very thoroughness of his subsequent precautions to keep the fifty-man contingent separate from the rest now helped the Princess. For nobody stopped to chat at the wagon, or to ask questions. Nobody saw the Persian woman climb up by a wheel and spring inside. Nobody heard the argument that followed.

"Gimme summore!"

"Send me a message first!"

"Uh-uh! Gimme summore, kid! Pass the bottle!"

"Give me a pencil and some paper. So. I will write a message—you will send it—then you shall have as much as you can drink."

"Pass the bottle here! Come on, I'm thirsty!"

"No. I will give you a little more—there—now—no, that is all! Now give me the pencil and paper—thank you!"

From somewhere under her Persian dress the Princess drew a little book that was identical with that taken by Dick from the General's belongings. Carefully, but with a speed that proved her long familiar with the code, she wrote out a message in a clear, bold hand.

"Send this," she said quietly.

"Gimme another drink, that's a good girl!"

"First send this."

"Send what? What is it? Send it where?"

"Call P-P-L. Keep on calling P-P-L."

Automatically almost, the man dispatched the signal-number that she gave him, and from overhead the wires crackled that had been silent all afternoon.

Dick Anthony, passing up and down the horse-lines, heard the crackling and turned his head. Then it occurred to him that the man in the wagon must be acknowledging signals. He went on examining the horses, being satisfied that the wireless-expert would write down anything that came. But the crackling continued, at a growing pace, and Dick grew uneasy.

Presently he left the horses, and went striding across camp in a hurry. He had to pass the Princess' tent to reach the wireless-wagon. He saw the sentry leaning on his rifle half-asleep; he went near enough to smell the fellow's breath, and then he opened the tent-flap to find nobody inside. And still the wires up over the wagon crackled like burning thorns!

THE nearest man was the sentry. Dick seized him by the scruff of the neck and shook him until he dropped his rifle—until the cartridges fell out of his bandolier—until the world became to him a

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futurist affair of streaky parallels, without sense, purpose or stability—shook him until the fumes of vodka left the inside of his skull, and nothing much was left to him at all except desire to breathe and to obey.

"Go and get Jenison *amelikani!*" ordered Dick, giving the American the title bestowed on him by the Afghans of his command.

"Where?"

"Find him! Bring him!"

The man reached for his rifle, but Dick set his foot on it. The man reached for cartridges, to refill his bandolier, but Dick's attitude was eloquent and he started off toward the artillery lines just in the nick of time to avoid a kick that would have lifted him well forward on his journey. Dick picked up the rifle, beckoned a passing non-commissioned man, and ordered rifle and cartridges all taken to the guard-tent.

"When their owner comes to claim them," he ordered, "refuse him. Hand him over to the officer commanding the baggage-train, with orders to use him as a mule!"

"To hear is to obey!"

"It had better be!" said Dick.

Then Dick saw Jenison, and timed himself to meet the American exactly abreast of the wireless-wagon. The crackling had ceased, and a face that peered through an opening to see if all was clear, drawing back again as he approached.

"Hullo, Jenison!" he called.

"Hullo! What's new?"

"A change of plan, that's all. Sha'n't start for a few days—very likely three days, and perhaps four."

"But why? Man, why in thunder not?"

"Several reasons," Dick assured him, looking so gloomy and speaking so gloomily that Jenison stepped closer to get a better look at him. And yet Dick raised his voice.

"There's news of reinforcements coming on to join us from the rear, for one thing. Some reports say five thousand infantry—well worth waiting for. For another thing, the horses are badly done up—need a rest to be any good at all."

"Mine aren't," vowed Jenison. "The gun-teams are good for a hundred miles!"

"The guns can't go on alone," said Dick, speaking so distinctly that Jenison grew nervous and looked about him for fear they might be overheard. "And besides, the men won't march until they've had a rest and cut up the loot between them. I'm rather counting on the arrival of the reinforcements to put new ginger in them."

Jenison stared blankly, dropping his lower jaw a fraction of an inch, for this was not the Dick Anthony the Resolute, of whom he had heard when in Teheran, whom he had led fifty men to seek, under whom he had fought, and whom he had learned to admire more than any other man on earth. This was an ordinary person speaking, some mere victim of circumstance and whim. He could have done better himself than sit down in a mud-puddle in the rain, to wait while the men changed their minds.

"Man, we're lost if we wait a day! We *must* move!"

"We'd be lost if we had a mutiny," said Dick.

"D'you mean——"

"Come to my tent, and I'll convince you!" Dick took his arm and led him along.

WHILE they squelched through fifty or sixty yards of mud Dick strode in silence, never once looking to the right or left. Then,

"What's that noise?" demanded Jenison.

"News of my change of plan going to Baku! That's your wireless-expert sending a message for the Princess, saying that we'll wait here three or four days because the men won't march!"

"Nonsense!"

"Fact!" Dick assured him. "No, she isn't in her tent. I came from there. I gave her the vodka myself with which she bribed your man."

"On purpose to bribe him?"

"No. That part was unintentional. It was my oversight, so your man sha'n't be shot. Ah! Here's Usbeg Ali—Usbeg Ali, get a move on! We start in an hour, and sooner if you can!"

"Whither, *bahadur?*"

"Baku!"

The Afghan saluted.

"Go and get your guns away, Jenison!"

Jenison too saluted, and the act seemed to give him pleasure.

"Has the man gone to Teheran with the key of that box?" asked Dick.

"Surely," said Usbeg Ali.

"Then let me have that ten-man escort now, instead of tomorrow morning."

"In five minutes they shall be here, *bahadur.*"

"Don't want 'em here! Send 'em to the

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wireless-wagon. Let 'em take the drunken man who's in there, and the Princess too if she's in there. If the Princess isn't in there, let 'em take her from her tent and escort both to Teheran together. Be sure that the Princess takes her steel box when she goes!"

"Is that all, *bahadur*?"

"That is all," said Dick. "Do that. Send word to the rear for the mounted men to close in and follow up—and then lead off. I'm going to burn whatever we can't take with us. The main thing is to hurry. Send Andry Macdougal to me if you see him anywhere. That's all, Usbeg Ali."

So the Afghan saluted, clicked his heels together, and was gone.

V

NO BUGLE or trumpet blew to herald Dick's start on a raid that was more daring than any in the greatest war in history. It was the blare of Andry's bagpipes, coaxing the half-drilled infantry into time and step, that set the pace and proclaimed the raid's true character.

Many and many a handful has won fame by holding a pass, or by fighting a good rear-guard action against ten times its number, just as many a nation has won infamy by swarming armed into the territory of a lesser power.

But it has not happened often, except when Scotland raided England, that the lesser—say eight thousand—has dared invade the greater. It was sheer, stark, laughing madness, and every man who sploshed through the mud behind Dick Anthony that afternoon in time to "The Campbells are Comin' " knew it—knew that Russia's millions lay over the border beyond, and that nothing less than genius could save them from utter destruction!

Not a man marched sadly. Not a man but believed Dick Anthony the one man in a million with brains and spunk enough to turn the trick. Even the wounded, left in a body at the first village and not overconfident of being fed, shouted encouragement until the last of the rear-guard rode by.

Even the trace-men, hauling beside the horses to help Jenison's guns along, hauled with a will and needed no urging. Night shut down on a muddy eight thousand that marched and marched and marched, and thought only of the goal ahead; on an Andry whose cheeks ached from the blowing; on an Usbeg Ali Khan five miles ahead, whose brown eyes pierced the gloom, with a screen of spaced-out scouts on either hand of him; and on a red-headed, bare-headed Dick who rode not at all like a man in a dream, but like a man who is conscious of his danger and entirely master of it.

The cold rain came down on them again, driving in torrents into their faces and burdening the infantry beneath the extra weight of wetted clothing. Yet, the mile-long columns laughed, tossing new jokes from company to company; for the Persian of the North is a stout, good man for all his rulers, his religion and his weaknesses, and Dick had called up the stoutness from its slumbering depths. Most of all they joked about the Princess Olga Karageorgovich, whom many of them had seen sent southward surrounded by ten men. They joked as the East does always, without what the West calls decency.

Dick, except when some ribaldry or other passed him wind-whipped from the gun-tails back to the squelching infantry, did not even spare a passing thought for any woman in the world—neither for Marie Mouquin, sitting propped upright by cushions in a wagon at the rear straining her ears to catch Andry's bagpipe-music, nor for Marie's former mistress.

BUT the Princess was thinking of both maid and Dick, when she was not storming at the Persian horsemen who escorted her at Dick's command. The horsemen were not at all in love with the notion of riding away from the scene of Dick's next operation, and she worked with a will and a forked tongue to make them less so; but tongue-work did not prevent her from thinking furiously. Speech with her never represented more than what she *had* thought; her true thoughts were ever secret to herself, unexpressed except in ceaseless watchfulness.

She laughed once or twice in memory of her "I surrender!" and of Dick's ready belief. Never, never, never would she surrender so long as she had breath, whatever mere words might be made to seem to say! She had set her tigress' heart on Dick when she first set eyes on him and, ruined or triumphant, she would fight to own him while she had breath, if only for obstinacy's sake, and cunning's.

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So she was in no mood to be hustled down to Teheran. When Dick determined first to send her there the idea had suited her finely, for she thought herself at the uttermost end of her resources. Protection from the British Government would have given her breathing space in which to plan new activity.

But communication with the Russian General and discovery of the wireless-plant had changed all that. She had been able to notify the Russian Government of the whereabouts of those most important, most incriminating plans; and that had shown her a less passive, therefore a more acceptable course to take.

The plans were worth more to Russia than to England, almost infinitely more. She stood to gain almost infinitely more by following Dick and getting them, to bargain with them afterward, than by telling the British representative at Teheran of maps that *had* been in Dick's hands but were now recaptured by Russia.

She had notified Russia of Dick's raid, repeating faithfully his talk of not starting for three or four days, to learn directly afterward that Dick had fooled her. Then it was time to act desperately. Her violet eyes gleamed at the thought of the revenge she would have on Dick for what she called his "treachery," until the drunken wireless-expert who clung to a horse beside her saw how beautiful she was and tried to make love to her.

He called her "Baby-doll!"

She back-handed him across the face, and there must have been some hard covering on her knuckles, for the blood ran in his eyes, and since he could not spare a hand from clinging to the saddle he could not wipe it out nor see.

The rain that swept into the face of Dick and his men chilled the spines of her escort and took out of them whatever little gusto for the homeward road they might have had. A village in which fires burned and men sat over the supper-pots appealed to them more than a night of floundering through mud, and a chat with the headman served to introduce them to an empty square building, built of wood, in one corner of which there was a six-by-six-foot cupboard of a place, tight-boarded off, with a heavy door.

They pushed her into the corner-room, with a bowl of food, and dropped the cross-beam into place that would keep her in there until it suited them to ride on next day.

Of the drunken man they took small notice. The departing fumes of vodka, unaccustomed exercise, and nervousness all had helped undermine his consciousness and he slept now, as a child does when fatigued, utterly oblivious to everything. They tossed him into a corner and left him there, while they busied themselves with supper; and it was very nearly midnight when the last of them wiped the cold fat out of his beard and rolled into his warm blanket, after making very sure that the outer door was bolted tight.

NOBODY heard the gnawing, like a great rat's, that might have been heard within the Princess' enclosure; and the man whose knife she had sneaked out of his belt did not miss it, or if he did miss it he supposed it shaken out somewhere on the road behind. The village was wrapped in the dead slumber of the over-eating sensuous East, and nothing moved but the village dogs that howled at the dismal wet, when the drunken American, sobered by the night chill, crawled around the room by the wall and lifted the heavy bar that served as door-bolt.

A gallon of cold rain, wind-gathered from the roof, splashed on him the moment he pushed the door open; but inside was the stink of unwashed men asleep, and outside the night smelled clean. He closed the door behind him, to receive a knife, up-driven, below his ribs that let the life out of him before he had time to groan. The knife was dulled by hours of hacking at tough wood, but the Princess' delicately molded wrist was like steel wire under her velvet skin.

There was a big beam outside as well as inside; the Princess swung it down and struck it three times with her hand to make sure it was tight in its niche; then, from under the veranda that ran around three sides of the building she dragged out a can of Russian kerosene that she had seen them stow there before they locked her in her room. She dragged it past two sides of the building through the yielding, sound-swallowing mud until she reached the hole she had hacked for herself. Then she dragged it through the hole and went in search of fire.

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Matches are a common enough article of trade on the Caspian shore, but men still keep fire in little earthen pots, and she found a pot hanging from a roof-beam of the veranda. She climbed through her hole again with it, and came hurrying out a moment later to run swiftly for the stables where fifteen or sixteen horses moved restlessly.

She did not wait to pick the best horse, but sprang on the first and sent him careering out of the village, riding bare-back with a halter for a bridle. Shouting behind her warned her that men were awake; a glance over her shoulder satisfied her that the men were busy, for red flames roared already skyward, turning the rain to white steam to be colored yellow and crimson and sent billowing up again. She laughed as she struck the horse with the steel box, that was all she owned of anything at all. She laughed again as she worked the horse around until he was headed northward in the wake once more of Richard Anthony of Arran!

Thenceforward for a few days, though she fought with cruel weather, her progress was comparatively easy. The rain was a screen that saved her from being seen; and those who travel in the wake of a hurrying army have no need ever to go hungry or ride over-slow. A hundred could have picked a living from the leavings.

Twice she changed horses, once stealing a remount from a village where Dick had left two hundred tired mounts in exchange for a hundred and twenty fresh ones. The tired mounts were well rested, and she stole the best of them at night. The second time, she took the mount of one of Dick's rear-guard who had stopped at a village to rest himself and maybe—soldierwise—find what he could find. He found a foundered horse without saddle or bridle in exchange for his own well-cared-for beast.

Slipping between the extended ranks of the rear-guard was a work of art, though not so difficult as might appear at first thought. The rear-guard were looking out for considerable bodies, on the assumption that the Russians *might* have an armed force somewhere on the flank that *might* slip by and cut communications from the rear.

To a wet-through woman, dressed in ragged Persian clothes but mounted on a good horse, it was mostly a matter of caution and wakefulness to get by, but once or twice she was stopped and questioned, and then she had to act.

None could act better. None would have dared act so many parts as she did. She played in turn on their superstition, on their greed, on their credulity; she told their fortunes, pretending to be a Gipsy woman, and speaking a dialect that might have been almost any brand of bastard Persian. Once she recalled the legend about Dick's being Alexander of Macedon come to life again to lead Persia to salvation, and she posed as a frenzied prophetess with her long hair streaming out behind her and her wonderful eyes ablaze with fervor.

AT LAST, in the rain of a desperate night, coughing as if her sides would shake apart, she slipped by Dick's farthest-placed picket, and was brought to a stand by the picket next beyond.

"Howt!" roared a Persian, with his finger crooked on a trigger that he had adjusted to his light-touch fancy; and she was too far gone—too wet and tired and weak, too ill—too dazed to disobey him and take another chance.

He strode toward her, pounced on her, dragged her to her feet and marched her with a bayonet at her back to his corporal, who sent her, with another man to help, post-haste to Dick. And Dick was snatching part of the four hours of sleep that he allowed himself. He came from his tent savage at the interruption, holding a lantern above his head and peering forward. She flung herself in the mud at his feet.

"Dick! Oh Dick! Dick Anthony!"

A hurricane of coughing checked her speech, and she clutched at the mud with struggling fingers until Dick stooped down and raised her, swearing softly to himself. Then she flung herself into his arms and clung there, coughing, smearing him with mud from shoulder down to heels.

She said something to him between bursts of coughing, and he bent his head to listen; so she kissed him, and laughed until the laughter turned to coughing again, and she drove her little steel fingers into his flesh in a paroxysm of pain.

Dick picked her up in both arms, for there was nothing else that a gentleman could do, and carried her into his tent, calling to the orderly to follow him. Then, while the orderly watched her and she drank the soup

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that had been made ready against Dick's waking, Dick went to a wagon and had room made for her on a mattress stowed between the stores.

After that he had her carried to the wagon, and a Persian woman from Marie Mouquin's staff of nurses was sent to wait on her. A dozen men were told off to march by the wagon, three on either side, three behind and three in front, and then Dick mounted his own charger to see to the resumption of the march.

He was very close to the Russian border now, and his numbers had been swelled by the addition of Persians trained by Russian officers, who deserted to him as he marched northward. There was nobody who could work the wireless for him and he had left it behind, smashed into uselessness; but Usbeg Ali and his scouts were busy, and the natives of the villages he passed were all in sympathy with him, so that he had food for his men and did not need to waste men on foraging parties or in protective raids.

And there were many natives who were so in touch with Russia that they could tell him of what was passing beyond the border. He knew now beyond any doubt at all that every living man in uniform who could be mobilized was being hurried westward to the frontiers where Austria and Germany were snatching the advantage given them by ability to mobilize more quickly.

Time being an enormous factor in the situation, every railway-line, single or double tracked, was blocked to capacity with trains all going one way; the roads were blocked with automobiles of every kind, crowded with men.

Dick was told twice by men who should have known, for they were merchants doing business in corn and fodder with the Russian Government, that practically nothing had been done to oppose him. Men refused to believe in Russia that he was a real danger. He could not even hear of an aeroplane that had been spared to use against him; all the heavy guns, and all the more modern appliances of war were on the way to the front or there already.

They told him that even the four troop-trains had so upset the schedule that the provision-trains and oil-trains out of Baku were in almost inextricable confusion. And on every hand Dick was assured that nobody in Russia believed he had more than a handful with him.

"They have been told by wireless that I am coming, and with how many," Dick assured them.

"No. That can not be. The rumor is that you gave the slip to the ten thousand sent against you. The government depends on that ten thousand turning and catching you from behind!"

DICK sent for the Princess, and they carried her to him on a litter for she seemed too weak to stand.

"What was the wireless message you persuaded that man to send?" he demanded.

She laughed at him, until a fit of coughing seized her.

"Bribe me!" she said when the coughing was done, and Dick thought swiftly of a way to bribe her.

"Kiss me," she said, "and I'll tell you, for my time is short, Dick Anthony!"

She laughed again then, merrily for a wonder, until the coughing resumed. Any woman would have laughed at the sight of Dick's strong face betraying weakness, irresolution, worry, distaste, every sign of all the qualities he held in greatest disregard!

"Kiss me," she said again, "and I'll tell you, Dick!"

There are men by the million to whom a kiss more or less under almost any circumstances means nothing, or at most means a momentary flutter of the heart. But men do not rise to Dick's height, nor are their deeps like Dick's, who hold their lips lightly either in speech or touch. The words that left Dick's lips were such as he would stand or fall to prove; and since his mother died he never had kissed a woman for the all-sufficient reason that he had not loved one.

To his decent mind, with its ticketed, docketed clean-cut facts and clear-drawn theories, a kiss was the outward and visible sign of love. And he did not love the Princess. The argument was as clear and positive to him as the better-known and more generally accepted one that two times two are four.

Yet the Princess seemed to him to be dying, and there were many of his men, who swore that they knew the symptoms, who assured him she was dying. To kiss a dying woman at her own request was not such a very ungentlemanly thing.

Jenison rode up through the blackness to ask for orders and to gather information if

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there were any. And Jenison was a man with a punctilious sense of honor; Dick felt relieved that Jenison should overhear.

"Kiss her!" said Jenison, and turned away.

And yet Dick did not kiss her. Naked, he could have faced and felt red flame that minute without wincing to help this or any woman. Kiss her he could not.

Usbeg Ali Khan, fierce-bearded and fierce-eyed, came cantering from the front to talk with Dick about stories told him by some villagers. He halted ten yards away, seeing that Dick was engaged, and a Persian who knew enough English to interpret what was passing told the Afghan all about it.

So Usbeg Ali, with an Afghan oath on his lips that ought to have peeled the skin from them, strode into the lantern-light; and what he had to say was so altogether Eastern in its point of view and so completely scandalous that the Princess winced on her cushioned litter, and Dick ordered him away without ceremony.

"Get out into the night with the other dogs!" growled Dick; and the Afghan went, realizing that he had made some awful blunder and wondering what it was.

Andry came, tremendous and solicitous, as he always did whenever there was a halt of any long duration. Silent as a rock he stood behind Dick, and he heard the Princess coaxing.

"Afraid, Dick Anthony of Arran? No? If you're not afraid to kiss me, I'm not afraid to tell! Try me and see!"

"Kiss her, Mr. Dicky; it won't hurrrrt ye!" advised Andry.

But Dick would not.

Feeling in his pockets restlessly with fists that itched to help Dick out of his embarrassment, but without the least idea of how to do it, Andry felt a ball of paper and began to crumple it tighter automatically. Then for a reason that he never could explain he found his tongue and began to speak of unimportant things.

"Mr. Dicky!"

"Yes."

"Ye mind ye gave me orrrrders tae smash yon wireless-wagon 'way back behind?"

"Yes."

"Wull—I smashed it."

"Well?"

"Before I broke the apppparrratus up intae leetle bits, I found a wee bit paper."

"Well?"

"I hae it here."

"What of it?"

"This is her."

HE DROPPED the crumpled ball of paper into Dick's open palm, and Dick—uninterested but relieved by anything that took his mind for a moment from the problem—began to uncrumple it. He smoothed it out and held it toward the lantern, and Andry all but jumped in spite of his proud Scots phlegm when he saw the sudden change in Dick's face and sensed the turn affairs had taken.

"What is it, Mr. Dicky?"

But Dick was too busy to answer him. Spread on his knee was the coded message that the Princess had bribed the American to send, and Dick's hand was busy searching in an inside pocket for the little book he had found among the General's effects.

The Princess stared hard and tried to rise and snatch the message, but Andry saw her in time and his huge bulk intervened. The Princess sank to her couch again. Dick's fingers moved like lightning through the pages of the little book, as word by word he decoded the penciled message.

He began to smile and his eyes quite lost the strained look they had worn. He even hurried less in his search for the meaning as he neared the bottom of the sheet, and at last he reached the line added at the bottom after the coded signature, that told of his change of plan, of the planned three or four days' delay, and of Dick's supposed fear of a mutiny.

"Tell me," said Dick, leaning forward suddenly and addressing the Princess, "why did you say nothing of my having defeated your ten thousand men?"

"They were never my ten thousand!"

"Why did you say nothing of my having defeated them?"

The Princess coughed for about two minutes, shook her head apparently in token that circumstances were too many for her, and decided in a whim of the moment to answer him.

"I agreed with the General not to."

"Why?"

"Why? Is it not obvious?"

"Not in the least," said Dick.

"The General hoped that his men would rally and attack you from the rear. A defeated General is not *persona grata* in Russia.

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His best plan was to wait in the hope of a reverse to you that would set him free, and perhaps set him at the head of his own men again. He agreed to befriend me afterward, should circumstances favor him. We formed a partnership. It is never good to be dead until one ceases breathing! So I go without my kiss?"

She said the last six words in a tone of disappointment that was new and rang more genuine than anything Dick had heard her say. There was a note of resignation in her voice that could scarcely have been acted.

"I would really have told you, had you paid the price I asked. And it was not a very high price. Tell them to carry me away."

Dick arose and stepped toward her litter.

"You shall have your price!" he said, and he knelt beside her as if she had been an angel and he a suppliant for grace. Under the eyes of Andry and a dozen wondering Persians he bent over her and kissed her on the lips, and she threw her arms around his neck, sobbing and stuttering:

"Dick—Dick! Oh Dick! There was never a day when I would not have died for you! Kiss me again, Dick, for I'm dying!"

So he kissed her again, and then bent her arms back and released himself.

"Take her back to her wagon!" he ordered, and four men raised her litter.

"Good-by Dick! Thank you, Dick!" she called.

But Dick did not answer. He was rubbing his lips with the back of his hand, with his back toward her.

"Andry!" he ordered suddenly. "Get word to Jenison and Usbeg Ali Khan to hurry on at once!"

They picked up the Princess to carry her away, but she called to Dick again.

"For that," she said, "just for that, Dick Anthony, I am your friend!"

VI

THE Russo-Persian is not at all like the Russo-German or the Russo-Scandinavian border. Almost nowhere can you lay your finger on the spot where Russia begins and Persia ends, for it has been part of the deep game Russia has played for years to make the border-line a thing of mystery, to be argued about and trespassed over at intervals.

The inhabitants of the contiguous villages on either side are much alike, have intermarried, trade with one another, and unite in being whole-heartedly opposed to Government from either Petersburg or Teheran. They are convinced "home-rulers" who have little scruple as to the means employed for reaching the end in view; and they swung into line behind Dick Anthony, if not physically, at least with all the mental and moral support that he could wish.

He had no money, but they let him take whatever he wanted for his men without opposition; for they argued that the Russian Government would have to foot the bill. They would have been lunatics had they accepted Dick's receipts, or promises to pay, for in that case the goods would have been sold and they would have had no claim against any one except Dick Anthony; and nobody quite believed that Dick could do more than raid and run away again.

So the burst over the border, wherever the border might be, began auspiciously, and but for occasional little Cossack scouting-parties who fell away as Dick advanced, and here and there a few Russian or Russian-trained police who bolted on sight incontinently, there was nothing to impede Dick's progress.

He went into Russia like a whirlwind, doing no more damage than to burn the telegraph-poles and a few bridges over which an active enemy might possibly have hurried to cut him off.

He seemed reckless of his rear, of lines of communication, of anything and everything except the goal ahead. And that the goal was Baku became evident even to the camp followers long before he reached there.

His genius had detected Russia's weakness in the one spot where she was weak at that instant. Every preparation Russia had ever made had been for advance southward and eastward. It had never entered the heads of Russian schemers that Persia might some day awake out of anarchy and lethargy, pour men over the border and strike at the heart of a fat Lieutenancy.

Roads, railways, harbors, all had been designed with a view to moving forward one way; and now that every channel of communication had been blocked by troops and stores traveling the other way, the Lieutenancy of the Caucasus as well as Baku lay at Dick's mercy. And Dick was swift.

His chief problem was to get ammunition

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for the six field-guns that Jenison commanded, and that worried him more than anybody guessed until they brought him word that just where the railway dips to the south before turning north again to Baku there was a battery waiting to join issue with him, flanked by infantry and some horse.

He got word of it a little after dawn. By midday he had cut the railway line and burned the telegraph-poles to the westward of where the Russians waited, and therefore on the side on which they were sure he never would appear. He turned the track into a Chinese puzzle of twisted steel, as he marched westward instead of east. His back was to Baku, and Baku was his goal, but there were "eyes in the back of his head."

HE MARCHED due westward, in no hurry, until dark; and the Russians got behind him to cut off his retreat. That night he made a ten-mile line of bonfires, all of railroad-material, telegraph-poles and ties; and leaving the bonfires well alight he marched east again, and fell on the Russians before their scouts could bring them word that the fires were an empty ruse.

He caught them on the flank, and again from the side on which they were certain he would not come; and before the Russian guns could form to give battle—before one round was fired—Usbeg Ali Khan with a thousand men had swept down on them under cover of black darkness and had put them out of action. Jenison had twelve full wagon-loads of ammunition before the night was four hours old, and the Russian guns lay useless—smashed.

"Follow it up!" urged Usbeg Ali. "Pursue until they are scattered and can not form again!"

"Rest!" urged the infantry. "We are weary men, and we have won for you! Now let us rest!"

But Dick gave a nod to Andry, and the pipes droned out their clamor to be up and away and doing.

"On to Baku, now!" commanded Dick; and at dawn they lay down to sleep in sight of Baku, while Dick watched through his glasses the signs of panic that the appearance of a hostile force so near the city was bound to start in a population that is mixed of all the nationalities of the Levant, Asia Minor and the Caucasus.

The troops had gone west already; there was only a guard considered great enough to protect the oil-wells and the pipes that carry the lighter refined oils from Baku across the neck of land to Batum on the Black Sea. Dick bivouacked across the pipe-line.

Already not a tank-train of the heavier oil could move out of Baku; the little peninsula, on which the city and the oil-wells are, stood cut off from the rest of Russia, and Dick could cut the pipe-lines when he chose.

"D'you see the idea?" he asked Jenison.

Jenison nodded.

"Remember, I said we could paralyze 'em?"

"Yes."

"See that distillery over there? Yes—you can just make it out from here—take the glasses—see it?"

"Yes."

"They're depending on that for the gasoline supply of the biggest army that ever went into the field. This is a war of gasoline, this European war. They're using it for everything—flying-machines, transport, submarines, aide-de-camps—everything. They won't use a horse where a motor-car can be made to go.

"I want you to figure out the range, Jenison, as exactly as you can, from that gasoline-distillery to the raised ground on our left. We're going to take position on the raised ground—or at least you are—when the men have had one hour's sleep."

"Why not now?" asked Jenison, who believed his national luck was due to a habit of doing things without delay.

Usbeg Ali, riding up uninvited as he had a right to do, overheard him.

"Why? Why? Why?" he growled in English insolently. "Does a soldier ask why when a Dee-k-Anthonee gives orders?"

He dismounted, since he did not want a caution from Dick about sparing his charger when possible, and, tossing his reins to a trooper who had followed him, swaggered between Dick and Jenison, giving the American his back, a slight so evident that it was amusing.

Either Dick did not notice, or else he pretended not to notice; he was staring through his glasses again. He probably heard Andry tramp up, for Andry marched like a company of infantry; but he took no notice of Andry either.

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JENISON stepped around until he faced the Afghan. He had had more than enough of insolence. Coming from a land where men draw a color-line more closely than it is drawn in the older world, he considered he had done wonders in recognizing Usbeg Ali Khan as his superior in rank. He decided that the minute had come when an understanding on that point had better be reached if ever.

Andry, all grin and wrinkles, watched through weathered eyes that took in every point of the situation. He held no brief for either, for though he drew no Jenison color-line he had suffered none the less under the hectoring and domineering of what he was pleased to call a "black mon." He would have liked to see Usbeg Ali humbled just for once, however much he admired the swarthy horseman's skill.

And he was jealous of Jenison—plain, ordinary Scots jealous. He knew where every roll of fat was to be found in Jenison's anatomy, and his fighting-eye sought each spot now in turn, as he wondered where the Afghan would land first.

"You and I had better reach an understanding," Jenison began in a voice that was level as he could keep it.

Four feet away, Dick Anthony took not the slightest notice.

"I understand that I am second-in-command!" said Usbeg Ali swiftly. "That is enough!"

"Not quite enough," said Jenison. "I don't suppose you know what manners are, but you know what a beating is. If you offend me again I'll beat you!"

"Tut-tut!" muttered Andry, loud enough for Dick and the other two to hear. "A' talk an' no fechtin', like twa bairns baith feared o' t'ither!"

Dick surely heard; but he just as surely watched through his glasses what was passing on the outskirts of the city, and said nothing.

"*Allah!*" The exclamation was part amazement, but the greater part was bellicose threat. The Afghan's black beard bristled, as he bared his teeth in an unlovely grin. They were fine, white teeth, and Jenison's knuckles itched.

"*Bahadur!*" said Usbeg Ali, understanding nothing of the western code that prohibits "squealing," but sure of his rights and sure of Dick's support of them.

"Well?" asked Dick as if he had heard nothing. He returned the binoculars to their sling-case, and turned about to face the three. "What is it?"

"This one—" the Afghan pointed a finger at Jenison—"threatens he will beat me!"

"Why?" asked Dick.

"Because—by the blood of Allah—am I second-in-command, or am I not?"

"You are—at present!" Dick assured him, and Usbeg Ali's bluster seemed to lose its vim. "Why did he threaten he would beat you? On what condition?"

"If I offended him!"

"Why offend him?"

"But——"

Dick's strange eyes looked down at the Afghan's, and the strength of his face seemed scarcely human as he waited for an answer. But there was no answer.

"I—I would offend nobody! I——"

"Do you see that rising ground—over there to the left—four miles away?"

"Certainly I do! My eyes are not out of action!"

"Take a thousand men there—seize the best position you can find, and hold it! Scout carefully and thoroughly. Make ready to protect the guns as soon as they get there. Go!"

With a salute that would have passed muster for an obeisance, Usbeg Ali stepped backward and sought his horse. Dick turned on Jenison As the Afghan's charger dug his toes into the earth in answer to the spurs Andry grinned again, for it was plain as day to him that the American was next for a "first class dressin' doon."

"You offered to beat him, I think?" said Dick.

"I did," nodded Jenison.

"Have you been ten days with this force yet?"

"Nine," said Jenison.

"I've led it for six months—alone—with only a Scots servant to help out. I haven't beaten anybody, and I haven't needed to."

"I'm ashamed of myself," said Jenison.

"Will you rest your men one hour and then get your guns into whatever position Usbeg Ali has chosen for you on that rising ground?"

Jenison saluted.

"Yes sir!" he said; and as far as he could recall it was the first time he had called anybody "sir" since his school-days. He went after his horse with a distinct sensation that

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doing it had done him good. Dick turned on Andry.

"You great oaf!" he said savagely, and Andry winced. "You'd rather see your betters fight each other than prove yourself fit to serve under them! Get out of my sight! Go and present my compliments to the Russian General; tell him I want to talk to him. Present my compliments to the Princess and ask her to allow her guards to carry her here. Go!"

"Mr. Dicky—man—ye've no gude ground f'r ——"

"Go!" growled Dick, and Andry went with a flea in his ear. He delivered his two messages with a politeness to the General and the Princess that he would have considered weakness half an hour gone. He forgot to remonstrate with Marie Mouquin, weak yet from the dagger-wound received from the Princess, who was sitting nursing the Princess for all the world as if the two had never been enemies. He even forgot to kiss his girl, or to try to kiss her.

He strode off to sulk at the head of his sleeping infantry, and he proceeded after twenty minutes of reflection to turn their dreams to nightmares. He could render a Highland lament on the pipes as few men can, and the woe of a bursting heart, of pride down-fallen, of self-pity, grief, and home-sickness wailed and skirled through his chanter until the dense-packed companies writhed in sleep, and dreamed in sympathy.

MEANWHILE a little procession wound its way to where Dick stood bareheaded, like a statue of resolution staring at what must be. Men carried a litter on which the Princess lay, the General walked beside it and Marie Mouquin walked behind.

They laid the litter near Dick's feet. Signing for a bundle of blankets to be brought, Dick sat down on them beside the litter and bent forward so that he might hear better what the Princess said. But he changed his mind on a sudden and passed his field-glasses to the General.

"Take a look!" he said curtly. "Take a good look!"

The General did as he was told, with eyebrows expressing wonder that he should be expected to see anything worth looking at in the neighborhood of Baku, the abominable. As Dick had suggested, he took a good look, and after two or three minutes the military significance of Dick's position dawned on him.

He watched Usbeg Ali and the scouts—made a mental note of the fact that they were scouting close to deep wells of sweet water, and on a hill that would afford an excellent advantage for artillery. It was not a high hill, it was little more than a bank, but there were no obstructions between it and—the General's eye followed a line that led to the gasoline-distillery.

"Get the hang of it?" asked Dick.

The General stroked his beard as he handed back the glasses. He looked down the length of Dick's little army, estimating it, and then again at Baku. But he did not answer.

"I know from scouts and spies," said Dick, "that there are not enough trained men in Baku, counting those that I defeated last night, to give me much trouble."

The General, still stroking his beard, shut his lips tight, as if there had been some temptation to retort.

"And it will take four days at the least," continued Dick, "for the army that has gone westward to turn and attack me."

"But then it will be all up with you!" said the General. "I imagine our people will be decidedly out of patience. I am sure you must be cut off already from retreat in any direction. You will do well to revel in your last few days of life, Mr. Anthony!"

Dick ignored the pleasantry; it was not even possible to tell that he had heard it. He stooped over the Princess.

"I'm sending into Baku now," he said. "You'd better tell me what creature comforts you want most, and I'll do what I can to have them brought to you."

She coughed until the litter shook and the General turned his head away. Dick signed to Marie Mouquin and the maid came forward.

"Make out a list of what she most needs!" ordered Dick.

So Marie Mouquin, who had been the Princess' maid for so many years that she knew what to write down almost without giving thought to it, made out a little list and handed it to Dick. Dick gave it to the General. And the General dropped his jaw until the gold filling of his back teeth showed.

"Take it into Baku!" ordered Dick.

"Do I understand——"

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"I propose to explain what you are to understand!"

Dick was eying him in a way that gave the lie at once to the Russian's first assumption; yet, it was possible that Dick was afraid under that mask of manliness, and it was not to be forgotten either that the General had a dignity of his own that was very far from dead.

"I am your prisoner," he said stiffly, "and you have my parole. But I refuse to lend myself to any scheme of yours."

"Here is your parole!" answered Dick, handing him a scrap of writing. The General received it back and tore it up.

"Bring him his sword!" commanded Dick, and some one ran for it. Dick stood in silence until the sword was brought, and, with an expression that was enigmatic, watched the General buckle it on. The General's face expressed nearly as many different emotions as there are.

"Understand me," said the General. "Returning me my sword doesn't bind me in any way."

"Get him a horse!" commanded Dick.

"I give you no promise whatever!" the General insisted. "If you set me at liberty, I shall do my best to bring you to account!"

"You have seen for yourself," said Dick, "that I can cut this pipe-line when I choose. I can damage it to an extent that will take a long time to repair."

"Useless, my friend!" said the General. He was growing jubilant as he realized that Dick was in a tight corner. "In Baku they have pipe enough ready to make a new line from sea to sea! Destroy the whole, and in a very little while there will be another one!"

"With nothing at all to send through it!" said Dick.

"How do you mean?"

THE question had scarcely left the General's lips when a trumpet sounded at the far end of Dick's line, and with a cracking of whips and a lot of noise six guns—once Russian—got under way behind Jenison, and wheeled until they headed for the rising ground where Usbeg Ali and his horsemen studied the lay of things.

Dick watched them, saying nothing, until guns, ammunition-wagons and the men to serve them had mounted the rise and taken a position pointed out to them by some one waiting on the spot. And since there seemed nothing better to be done the General watched them too. He could not help but notice that the muzzles of all six guns pointed straight at the distillery, and that Jenison was busying himself with sighting each of them. As Dick and the General watched, the black muzzles began to point upward, inches at a time, for the range was long.

Then they brought the General's horse, and Dick looked it over.

"Take it away! Bring him a better one!" he ordered.

The General began to look now more triumphant than he had done yet, for there were evidences that a force of some sort was about to march out of the city. There was dust rising above the lower buildings in a way that to a military man is unmistakable.

"Remember, I have promised you nothing!" he insisted.

"It is I who am promising!" said Dick. "It is your business to convey my promise. You have seen for yourself that I command the pipe-line and the gasoline-distillery. I give you my word, as a soldier and a gentleman, that unless my demands are complied with before midday today I will bombard that distillery. In that case I wish it distinctly understood that I shall not rest until every oil-well and oil-tank in Baku is on fire. After that, I shall not care what happens."

"What are your demands?" the General asked.

"I will only make them through the senior British official in Baku, consul or whatever he is. He must come out here and talk with me, and unless you want immediate action from my artillery, the senior representative of the Russian Government had better come with him *with authority to act!*"

"I can not promise," said the General, with eyes still on the dust-clouds.

"It is I who promise!" answered Dick, turning to an orderly. "Gallop across and ask Mr. Jenison whether he has the range!" he ordered. Then he turned to another galloper. "Order Andry Macdougal to fall-in the infantry in column of companies!" With a long shrewd look at the dust above the distant roofs he turned then to the General again.

"Here's your horse. You'd better go. My card will reach there before you do;

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it will be my business-card, to show that I mean business. Understand me! I give them until noon, and not a minute longer! Good morning to you!"

WONDERING perhaps what his reception was likely to be, for a defeated Russian General is more likely than not to be sentenced to death by a court martial, the Russian rode away, trotting slowly until he had gone a quarter of a mile and then urging the horse into a gallop. Dick stooped beside the litter again.

"I'm sorry I must keep moving you," he said, "but you'll be better off on the top of that rise than you would be in the wagons and the dust. And I shall want you by me when the talk begins."

"D'you think they'll come and talk with you?" the Princess asked.

"I know they will!" Dick answered; and the Princess laughed at him, until a fit of coughing seized her, and Marie Mouquin had to kneel beside her and help her cling tight to life, as only one woman ever can help another by merely being woman and at hand.

Dick had the litter gathered up and ordered the bearers to follow him.

"Order the infantry up that hill!" he said, and another galloper went thundering off to where Andry sat with bagpipes on his knees. Less than a minute later the strains of "Macgregor's Gathering" began to call to the leading company, and Andry, like a great oak leaning in the wind, led off with his pipes above his shoulder, playing:

The moon's on the lake, and the mist's on the brae,
And the clan has a name that is nameless by day,
Then gather, gather, gather, Grigalach!

Dick swung into the saddle and cantered ahead of the litter, halting by Jenison who scratched a five-day beard and looked with pride at six gun-muzzles pointing skyward at angles which were mathematically perfect.

"At a word," he said, "I can blow that distillery to blazes!"

"Change the elevation of one gun, please," said Dick. "I want one shot—just one—sent straight over the distillery. I promised to send my card. Be sure you hit nothing. Fire when you like!"

Jenison attended to the card himself, stooping over the gun and laying it. In a moment the long black muzzle belched and a shell went whining over Baku, so straight for the distillery that for a moment Dick's heart was in his mouth. But Jenison had learned to know that gun; the direction was exact, but the shell landed and exploded in a roadway a quarter of a mile beyond the farthest tank.

VII

BAKU the abominable—Baku the polyglot—Baku the unwarlike, that has suffered in so many wars, that has been taken and retaken and given back—Baku that bears witness of the Parsee fire-worship, beside Moslem mosques and Christian churches built on the ruins of old Arab forts—Baku the offensive, whose food and whose dust and whose breezes smell of crude petroleum, hummed like a hornet-hive.

For Richard Anthony of Arran was something new in its experience.

The Great War had seen its quarreling atoms all unite and be one in denouncing Germany. The conscripts had been summoned to the colors, and, since Baku is comparatively near to the seat of war, its contingent was among the first that marched through Poland. Then there had been overtime at the oil-wells and refineries, and prosperity was Baku's for a while, because gasoline was the life-blood of this modern army.

Half a million men, who had been held in readiness to snatch Persia from under the sleepy nose of Britain, marched with the rest and helped to clog the travel-routes. Baku was left undefended except for her police and a small force of last-call reservists. Even the ten thousand horsemen who were sent into Persia to account for Dick Anthony had not had instructions to return to Baku; they were to have hurried westward when their quarry had been caught and spoiled of the secret papers.

In Baku they had not taken Dick Anthony seriously. Men were too busy there with their problems of race and creed, of labor-unions that fought one another and a repressive government, of oil-output and oil-fires. Even when Dick had stolen a section of the Russian Caspian fleet, and with it had sunk the most of the remainder, he had been regarded as a lucky man whose doom was very near. Close press-censorship

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and the fact that most of what Dick did was unbelievable had made him a myth rather than a man whom the crowd must reckon with.

Regiment after regiment that had been sent against him had been beaten, for Dick had contrived to take them one by one; but the public had not known that, for the fighting took place in Persia, and the telegraph-wires were the Russian Government's in the intervals when Dick did not tear them down.

The fact that ten thousand cavalry must be spared to march against him had come as a great surprise. It was resented, for the crowd was at war-heat, furious with Germany, and for the first time in all history unanimous. But the ten thousand men and a General rode off, and were forgotten because of the other news that was so far less definite and therefore lent itself so infinitely much more to exaggeration.

A wireless message came, to the effect that Dick had given the ten thousand men the slip, and would march into Russia after four days. But the public and the press were not taken into confidence about it, and the four days were considered by Baku's Governor ample in which to find Dick, bring him to bay, and smash him.

A wireless request, supposed to be from the General, that he be reinforced with ten thousand men, was taken as proof positive that the General had marched too fast and far; that Dick was between him and Russia; and that he would like to catch Dick between two overwhelming forces.

"He has plenty of men!" said the Governor. "He shall explain when he gets back why he could not spare men to protect the wires!"

Nobody worried about Dick, even when the wireless ceased to speak of him. A small striking-force of cavalry, infantry and guns was got ready to go after him in case of the impossible happening; nobody believed he would ever cross into Russia. When a British official of very high degree arrived in Baku, to inspect the petroleum and gasoline supply and presumably to make arrangements on behalf of the British Admiralty, almost everything was forgotten in the heat of this new excitement.

The high official had a man with him who was said to be a lawyer, and who made most shrewd and pertinacious inquiries about Dick Anthony, but even his strings of questions interpreted by police-officials lent him by the Government failed to make Dick a living entity in their imaginations. To them Dick was a more or less fabulous bandit, somewhere over the border in a land that nobody cared about.

THEN, suddenly, here was Dick, red-headed, real, and awake, with a wonderful old claymore at his belt and six captured Russian cannon in his train. Here was the railway cut and burned. And Dick sat on the pipe-line through which the precious oil-supply, that is Baku's only excuse for being, had to run! A beaten defending-force slunk into town without its guns or ammunition-wagons to announce him, and Dick followed them so fast that superstition awoke, and half the population swore he was not human.

There was panic. There was rioting, and there were very few troops with which to quell the mob. The dust that the General and Dick mistook for the sign of marching troops was churned up by the crowds that rushed to lynch the Governor. Had Dick known it, and had it been part of his plan, he might have marched into Baku almost unopposed and have sacked the place.

But even had he known it, it is unlikely that he would have diverged from his plan by a hair's-breadth, for his plan was good and there was more to be thought of than immediate gain. Persia would lose in the end by cutting a wound in Russia's flesh that would not heal. He sent in his ultimatum by a man who, though defeated and made prisoner, must be considered soldier enough to give a true account of the situation.

"Where are the plans you went to get with your ten thousand men?" he was asked, when they had saved him from the mob.

"He has them!"

"Where are your men?"

"Scattered to the four winds into Persia and dealt with in detail by the natives!"

"What has he sent you in for?"

"To name his terms!"

"What are they?"

So the General repeated what Dick Anthony had said to him, and gave them as well a fair account of Dick's resolution, and of the efficiency of his little army and its guns.

"The guns are all trained on the gasoline!"

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he assured them. He gave them his word of honor on the point.

"What does he mean to demand?"

"I don't know!" said the General.

The British very-high-official was invited to attend, and the matter was explained to him. At mention of the name of Anthony his gray eyes confessed to something more than the mild interest that had been his utmost concession hitherto. There seemed to be almost laughter in his eyes; and he had to clear his throat before he could tell them he wanted the lawyer, White.

"White's looking for him, you know," he said. "Most extraordinary case. Word reached England from your Foreign Office to the effect that young Anthony was dead and buried at sea. His uncle, I understand, wasn't sorry to hear it. But now the uncle is dead, and young Anthony would be the heir if he were alive. Most extraordinary part of it is that our Minister at Teheran has written London to say that a man claiming to be Dick Anthony of Arran is at large in Persia.

"White is of Mervin, White and Melville who are the lawyers for the Anthony estate, and he asked leave to travel under my wing, so to speak, on this trip so that he might trace Dick if possible. I knew young Anthony fairly well myself. Would know him again out of a million. Never saw a man quite like him, or with quite his presence. Most astonishing young man. If that's Anthony out there, you may depend on it he means what he says! Better humor him!"

"But this is an act of war!" swore the Governor of Baku. "If he is an Englishman, England is answerable for this series of outrages he has committed!"

THE British very-high-official drew into his shell with a completeness and rapidity that had taken him years to learn.

"Suppose you see what he has to say?" he suggested.

"He demands that the senior British subject in Baku go with me to meet him," said the Governor.

"Then I am undoubtedly the individual he means!"

"Will you go with me, if I go?"

"I am at your service. I suggest that White go with me."

So White was summoned, combing his mutton-chop side-whiskers with nervous fingers, yet giving the impression that a silk hat and a frock-coat were his rightful garb, and not altogether unpossessed of dignity.

"You see," said the Governor of Baku, as he rode by the side of the British very-high-official, with White and some half-dozen Russians in attendance—there was a white flag tied to a short pole with the party—"he has torn up the railway, and has fired on Baku. To treat with him is dangerous, for it is as good as to admit him a belligerent and not a bandit."

"That of course is your affair," the Englishman assured him. "I am merely here at your invitation."

"If only there were more time—time to wire for troops! But the railway-tracks are blocked for miles with troop and supply trains. There's no time to do anything!"

"As I remember them, both his father and Dick were always impetuous!" said the very-high-official unconsolingly.

They rode in silence side by side until Dick showed a white flag too from his eminence, and then the Englishman fell a yard or two behind.

Dick rode out to meet them, to escort them in person to the spot where the Princess lay on her roughly made litter.

"Did you bring any package for the Princess Olga Karageorgovich?" Dick asked.

"No," said the Governor curtly.

Dick halted.

"Would you care to send somebody back for it?" he asked.

"Gad! If that's not an Anthony I'll eat my horse!"

The very-high-official slapped his thigh, so that his horse was scared and sidestepped. Dick's eyes and his met, and Dick laughed aloud.

"Hullo, uncle Charles!"

"Hullo!" said the very-high-official; then he turned to White. "Recognize him, White?" he asked.

"That is Mr. Richard Anthony of Arran!" answered White.

"Oh hullo, White!" said Dick.

"My regards, sir! Glad to see you, Mr. Anthony!"

"About the Princess' package?" wondered Dick aloud, and as his official relative would have termed it, jibbing.

"I'll send a man back for what she wants.

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Let me see, wasn't there a list?" asked the Governor.

"There was," said Dick. "The General had it."

The Governor of Baku wrote a note on a sheet of paper torn from his pocket-book, and turning to one of his six attendants sent him galloping back to the city with it.

"NOW, follow me, please," said Dick, and he led the way at a canter to the summit of the rising ground. Then he sent at once for Jenison and Andry and Usbeg Ali Khan, and as each came he presented him. At Dick's order men brought a blanket and laid it on the ground not far from where the Princess lay. Dick felt inside his shirt and tossed a package into the middle of it. At another word from him, Andry and Usbeg Ali Khan each strode to the blanket and took stand beside it with a drawn sword in his hand.

"D'you recognize that?" asked Dick.

"No." said the Governor of Baku.

Dick looked hard at him, and the Governor stared back.

"Ask her!" advised Dick, pointing to the Princess who was being raised on pillows by Marie Mouquin. She seemed too weak even to rise into a sitting posture without help.

Frowning, for the Princess was in disgrace, the Governor stooped down beside the litter, and between long fits of coughing the Princess told him in Russian that the papers constituted proof—absolute, unqualified proof of Russia's intention to march half a million into Persia at a time when she was bound by treaty with Great Britain to do nothing of the kind.

"The map is there," she assured him, "and all the documents signed at headquarters, that give detailed instructions for the advance southward!"

The Governor stood up, eyed the package on the blanket and the two who guarded it, and drew out a cigar. He lit the cigar with a fusee, caught Dick's eye, and glanced along the lines of drawn-up infantry, that reached for half a mile on either hand. It was Usbeg Ali Khan who picked the red-hot fusee out of the papers and tossed it aside with a matter-of-fact air that would have done credit to an English butler.

"Do you know what the papers are now?" asked Dick.

The Governor of Baku nodded his head.

"Do you wish me to tell this gentleman—" Dick pointed to his uncle—"exactly what the papers are?"

"No!" said the Governor.

"Well," said Dick, "he shall see them unless we can come to terms."

"What are the terms?" asked the Governor.

"These," said Dick. "I am here on behalf of Persia. These men who have followed me are Persian patriots, who are in arms for the cause of Persia's freedom. In the presence of my uncle here, and witnessed by his signature, you are to give these men a written guarantee that Persian independence shall be always respected in the future. You are to agree to withdraw all Russian troops from Persia, and for all time, and to guarantee the integrity of the present boundary in perpetuity."

"I have no authority!" said the Governor.

"Then get it!" answered Dick.

"Impossible!"

Dick drew out a watch.

"At exactly thirty seconds after noon, by my time, I shall begin to bombard that gasoline! Shall we compare watches?"

The Governor looked at the very-high-official whom Dick had called uncle, but the Englishman was staring steadily at the papers on the blanket. He seemed to be in a day-dream.

"Incidentally," said Dick, "I shall show my uncle those papers, unless——"

"Come!" said the Governor of Baku. "We will ride back!"

He bowed a polite invitation to the British official to precede him.

"No!" said Dick. "I refuse to subject a person of my uncle's political importance to the danger of a bombardment. He stays here!"

Jenison, holding his sides with laughter, began to squint along his gun-sights, one by one.

"Shall I have shrapnel ready, or common shell?" he asked.

"Both!" ordered Dick.

"I claim the protection of the Russian Government!" said Dick's uncle, with a face that owned positively no expression.

"I can do nothing without authority," said the Governor. "I should have to wire Petersburg, and you have torn down the wires!"

"Use your wireless!" ordered Dick.

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"But understand me; I begin to bombard at thirty seconds after twelve, unless——"

The Governor of Baku paced up and down a time or two irresolutely, glancing from Dick to his uncle, all down the lines of Dick's ready little army, and then at the city and its tanks of dangerous, precious fuel.

"It seems I must leave you here!" he said at last.

"I hold you responsible!" Dick's uncle hastened to assure him.

SO THE Governor of Baku rode away, not as he had come, with dignity, but at a furious gallop; for the time Dick had granted him in which to communicate with Petersburg was none too long, and he had never been less doubtful in his life of the utter truthfulness of a threat. If there was any certainty at all it was that Dick would begin bombarding at the second specified, unless his terms were accepted first.

"Well, young man," said Dick's uncle when the Governor had gone, "what's it all mean? How do you propose to clear yourself of a charge of brigandage? You've got the Governor of Baku cornered, but what about afterward?"

"I shall hurry home!" Dick assured him.

"And be charged with filibustering, brigandage, dacoity, and about ten more offenses!"

"No!" said Dick. "I'm dead! You can't try a dead man. If I come to life again, what I did when the law of England called me dead is my affair!"

His uncle whistled.

"As long as you're my prisoner," said Dick, "I'll make use of you. Let me present you to the Princess Olga Karageorgovich."

His uncle bowed, and the dying woman smiled. Between violent fits of coughing she told, at Dick's request since the memory of Dick's kiss was on her lips yet how she had tricked and trapped and driven Dick into Persia that he might be made an outlaw and provide excuse for a Russian invasion of the country. She omitted little, except the story of her frenzied love for Dick, and of her attempts to murder him.

"Could you drop your official rank for a minute or two?" Dick asked when the Princess had finished.

His uncle nodded.

"Then, strictly *sub rosa* and unofficially, I'll let you look at those papers."

Andry picked them from the blanket and held them out. Dick's uncle glanced at them, studied the map for about a minute, whistled, and threw them back on the blanket.

"I'd rather not see any more," he said grimly.

"Are you official again?" asked Dick.

Again his uncle nodded.

"Then ask these men—" he pointed to Andry and to Usbeg Ali Khan, and then to Jenison—"whether I have done or permitted anything of which I, or my country for me, ought to be ashamed."

"They might be said to be accomplices!" his uncle smiled.

"But ask them."

"No," said Dick's uncle. "But if you'll let me, I would like to ask some questions of the rank and file."

"Help yourself!" said Dick. "Shall I interpret for you?"

"I learned Persian at Oxford, and spoke it in India before you were born, my boy!"

So Dick's uncle went alone along the lines of infantry and asked what he chose, listened to what he chose, and drew deductions unaided. What they told him none but he ever knew; but in addition to the nonsense about Dick being Alexander the Great come to life again they must have told a heap of truth; and since they were speaking to a man who knew his India, and the East through India's eyes, that very-high-official must have garnered more than one glimpse of what the real Dick looked like on campaign, of how Dick had behaved, and of what the men felt who loved him and tramped behind him.

When he walked back to be ready to meet the returning Governor his mere relationship and interest in Dick seemed changed to a regard that men do not put into words. Eye to eye, truth and recognition of the truth flashed back and forth between them.

"There's only one thing, then, I've got to add," said Dick. "I'm going to leave myself in your hands. You draw up an agreement with the Governor of Baku and I'll sign it over your signature. I insist on permission for Andry Macdougal, Usbeg Ali Khan and his seven personal followers, Mr. Jenison and his followers, and the Princess Olga Karageorgovich, as well as Andry's sweetheart Marie Mouquin, to go

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where they care to unmolested."

"How about yourself?"

"I? I shall lead these men back into Persia, of course."

"And afterward?"

"I shall go to England, and shall ask you for your influence toward getting me a regular commission."

"I promise it to you now, my boy!"

SO THE convention between Dick and the Russian Government was drawn up by a practised hand, and the British Embassy was notified of it less than two hours later by wireless to Petersburg, for Dick's uncle saw to that. When the clocks of Baku struck the hour of noon the ink was not yet dry on the signatures.

By three that afternoon—without the Russian guns, which he gave up to the Governor of Baku—Dick was already on his way southward, riding at the head of an army that did not quite understand but was content to follow him. And Dick was not alone.

Jenison for one refused point-blank to leave him.

"There'll be nothing doing in my business until this war is over," he asserted. "I may as well make the best of it. If you'll let me, I'll come with you."

"Come on!" said Dick. "I like you."

So, Jenison and Dick work side by side at the new work that Dick has undertaken; and though he is American, and a man of business first and last, Jenison has forgotten his own business completely in his interest for Dick's.

Andry was given no alternative.

"Go home and join the army!" ordered Dick. "Buying your discharge to follow me gave you no moral right to stay away when war breaks out. Go home and enlist again. Marry your girl in Baku—there'll be a chaplain there—and take her home with you. When I get home I'll make provision for you. When the war's over, or you're wounded, come to Lamlash. If I'm not there, I'll leave word for you."

And Usbeg Ali Khan rode too with Dick, for as he said himself:

"I am a man of war, *bahadur*—born for the work of war. I think there will be ever fighting where thou goest, for there is ever a right and a wrong, and thou art so hot for the right that the wrong must fight or quit! I choose to go with thee. And my seven will follow me, because I call them."

THE Princess died in Baku, in Marie Mouquin's arms. Dick kissed her again before he left, and because she begged him to, and she smiled as she died with the memory of his kisses on her lips.

But for her Dick never would have entered Persia; never would have cast his strength of character and honesty into Persia's scale against Russia; and never would have won from the British Government the job of jobs, the independent, lone, extremely difficult command he holds and in which Jenison helps him.

Even now he would not hesitate to say that he would have preferred to end Colonel of his father's old regiment. But nevertheless, being Dick, he is not without gratitude that other men—such as Jenison—might call quixotic and absurd.

On one day each year he has determined to wear mourning for the Princess Olga Karageorgovich; and to say a word against her in his presence at any time would be to learn what a gentleman dare say and do to prove he bears no resentment, even against such an enemy as she was.

THE END

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MAGPIE'S NIGHT-BEAR

By W. C. Tuttle

I WAS readin' th' other day that down at th' New York Zoo they have proved that old sayin' that "Music hath charms to soothe th' savage beasts."

Shucks, I saw that proved in a sort of a way about eight years ago! Not bein' able to whistle or sing while runnin' at full speed, I've never tried it on any of th' bears I've met on narrow trails, but they say it will soothe 'em—maybe!

Magpie Peters read books on hypnotism fer a while and then went out and tried it on a bob-cat. I was laid up in a hospital in Helena when they brought him in, and him and me got out together prospectin'. We dug holes in th' ground from Nome to Mexico and as far east as Butte, and this little episode happened while we were huntin' fer bed-rock on a little creek over in Western Montana.

This particular little creek didn't have no name, until one day a Piegan Indian came along on his cayuse and stopped and watched us rastlin' boulders. He looked on for a while, and then as he rode away he looked over his shoulder and remarked—

"Plenty stone—hell!"

We left th' last part off and filed our location as bein' on "Plenty Stone Creek." We tacked th' last part on often enough. We had a pretty fair cabin—never did know who built it—and real honest-to-grandma furniture. Th' bed was made of iron, rods all bent and twisted sort of artistic like, and th' chairs were sort of spindlin' things with stuffed seats. One of them was a rockin'-chair, with most of th' stuffin' gone, and th' other was a baby's high-chair.

I reckon some high-toned fambly had summered in them hills, and done left their effects. But th' dandy part of our outfit was th' phonygraft!

Magpie wasn't exactly a miser, and one day he gets his skin full uh joy-juice, and buys this talkin'-machine. In them days yuh has to pay money fer a thing like that, and I reckon this one sets Magpie back about fifteen ounces—that bein' about two hundred and fifty in civilized money.

We was th' envy of all th' sourdoughs in them hills, and sometimes they would come for miles to hear it.

OUR cabin was built with sort of a loft across th' rear end. A cross-log, with poles laid across and connectin' with th' logs on th' end, and we used it as a place to store our flour and beans and some extra stuff. Our cabin wasn't any too roomy.

Me and Magpie tries sleepin' on th' bed fer quite a spell, but I has to quit it in order to git some sleep. Magpie was a good pardner and a plumb white person, but he shore had th' most healthy snore I ever heard.

Th' first time I ever heard it I gits up and blows in his face and dumps him out on th' floor, thinkin' he's chokin' to death. It cost me two teeth and a busted nose before I

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could explain. Uh feller shore can't sleep with a person chokin' to death in his ear, so I gits me some fir-boughs and bunks on th' floor.

One night after a long session with th' phonygraft, we leaves th' machine on th' floor in a corner and goes to bed. I been sleepin' quite a spell when something wakes me up.

At first I thinks it must have been Magpie's snorin', but something makes me watch th' door. It was moonlight and th' cabin was light as day.

Pretty soon I sees th' door move. It jist moves an inch at uh time, and by th' time it's moved six inches, I'm of th' opinion that I'll never be able to comb my hair agin. I was jist goin' to say "Come in," just like that, when th' door flew open and there stood th' biggest bear I ever saw!

Holy mackinaw! I reckon he stood seven feet at th' shoulder and was extra long fer his height! I'm not a person who is easily excited, and not overly active for my age, but if any one had seen me do that back-action hop to that loft, they would have sworn that I'd practised it all my life.

I spills around up there considerable—my hands and feet tryin' to locate all th' places where there ain't no poles across. After while I gits organized and looks down at Mr. Bear, but he's still in th' door, lookin' at me. I'd plumb forgot about Magpie, who was snorin' loud and clear, until th' bear saunters inside. I figgers that Magpie is better off asleep as long as th' bear lets him alone, so I don't say a word.

TH' BEAR makes his first move by goin' over and leanin' up against our stove—which ain't noways solid on its pins—with th' result that said stove lays down and pulls th' pipe along. Th' bear gits soot in his nose, and while backin' and sneezin' across th' room he knocks down our dry-goods-box cupboard. That makes him sort of nervous and he jumps up on th' rockin'-chair sort of heavily, with th' result that he gits a wallop from th' back as it flies up.

Golly, that bear whimpers like a kid and shuffles over to look at Magpie. He seems sort of partial to Magpie's snore and tries to git up on th' bed. I'm kinda worryin' about Magpie's health about now, and starts lookin' fer a weapon. All I could find was a fifty-pound sack of flour, so I takes aim with that and lets her fly.

Zowie! It hits th' bear smack on th' head and busts wide open. Th' air is so full uh flour I can't see what's doin', but I hear Magpie yell—

"Git yer darn big feet off my face, Ike!"

Then I sees th' bear start to back off th' bed, but his toe-nails git hung up in th' blankets some way, and he tips th' whole business over.

I'm worried about Magpie all this time, but I jist had to lay down and laugh. It shore was a mess. Th' bear has got his head through th' foot of th' bed, and starts a promenade around th' room, draggin' Magpie, who's twisted up in th' blankets and bed so he can't help himself a-tall. I sits in th' game again by heavin' a sack uh beans at th' bear, but I hits Magpie on th' head, causin' him to cuss fluently.

THEN they starts a marathon around th' room and scratches up our furniture a-plenty. Th' bear gits that high-chair around his neck on th' second lap, and that swingin' high, wide and handsome, knocks Magpie's rifle off th' wall, and it also joins th' procession.

All this time, Magpie is cussin' and pullin' and tryin' to git loose, but th' bear don't notice him a-tall, bein' as he's some busy too.

After makin' a mulligan of everything that's loose, th' bear stops and paws th' mixture loose from his carcass. He gits it all loose except th' high-chair. He sits up and between pants he sizes Magpie up.

Pretty soon he licks his chops and growls and th' hair on his neck begins to raise up, and I says to myself—

"Good night, Magpie!"

Jist then he backs up to git a runnin' start at Magpie, but he don't never make that start. There comes a queer scratchin' noise and a bugle blows. Then a voice yells:

" 'Tenshun! Right face! March!" and th' drums goes, "*Thrump — thrump — thrump, thrump, thrump!*"

It's that darn phonygraft. Th' bear had done sat down on th' dingus which starts it.

At th' first notes of that bugle, th' bear reaches down and picks up Magpie's rifle, and stands up jist like a man, and when th' order came to march, he wheels around and hikes right out of th' cabin. I darn

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near fell out of th' loft watchin' him, and th' last we saw of him he was still walkin' down th' hill into th' timber, with that rifle over his shoulder and th' high-chair around his neck and trailin' along behind.

I helps Magpie loose, and we sits around considerable, talkin' it over. Magpie argues that we're both loco, and that it ain't reasonable to suppose that any bear will come into a man's home and mess things up thataway and walk off with a rifle over his shoulder.

He's some scratched up and sore, and in jist th' right mood to win his argument by fair means or foul, so I goes to sleep, leavin' him alone to think it over.

IN TH' mornin' he ain't in no better humor, and at breakfast he asks me what for I lays safe up in th' loft and laughs and heaves sacks uh beans at his head, while he's fightin' to th' death with an enormous grizzly?

I'm jist about to make a soft answer when th' door opens and in comes Tellurium Woods. Tellurium is doin' a piece of development work about two miles from us, and he's been down to Granite after grub, and brings back th' latest newspapers. Magpie takes one of them and goes back in th' corner to read off his grouch, while me and Tellurium sit on th' woodpile and swap lies.

Pretty soon Jake comes out and hands me th' paper and points to a certain place. It ain't but a few lines, and reads something like this:

LOST—A trained black bear. Weighs about 300. Answers to the name of Gladys. Is trained in the manual of arms. Escaped from the express-car at Granite on July 15. Fair reward. Notify express company.

I starts to laugh, but Magpie puts his hand on my shoulder and looks me square in th' eyes, and I—well, I asks Tellurium how's th' ground breakin' fer him?

After Tellurium leaves, I goes in to wash th' dishes. Magpie is sittin' on th' step, smokin' his pipe, when I says—

"Magpie, we might gather in that fair reward, eh?"

"As mason to mason," he replies, "I states that I don't hanker fer Gladys none a-tall. That ol' 30-30 was plumb full uh soft-nose ca'tridges, and as far as I knows that 'manual of arms' might mean sharp-shootin'!"

AROUND THE BASES

By Octavus Roy Cohen

WHEN the draft mesh was unraveled, the Marines found themselves in possession of a young South Atlantic Leaguer who answered docilely enough to the name of Jimmy Conifer.

Jimmy was only a kid, but during the training season in Texas he showed up mighty well on the infield—before the regulars rounded into shape. He could do the hundred in ten and two-fifths, handle a grounder gracefully, throw like a bullet and bat well. But he did not impress Manager O'Leary to the point of disrupting his infield, and he was farmed out to the Southern League before the season was well under way.

Jimmy's failure to make good with the big leaguers, although not unexpected, was a decided disappointment. Jimmy felt that

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he could hold down an infield position creditably, and besides, when it came to the matter of supporting a wife, a $3,000 salary in the major circuits was preferable to a meager $100 a month in the bushes. Jimmy, as you may have guessed, had matrimonial aspirations.

So Jimmy traveled to Birmingham with a leaden heart, and startled the fans of the Southern League with his brilliant work But the Marines had gotten away to a good start in the majors and the infield was working perfectly; so, save for an occasional pleased glance at Jimmy's record, Manager O'Leary gave him few thoughts.

Nothing which affected Jimmy occurred until the home-stretch of the major-league season had been reached. The Marines were playing the Millers when the giant first-sacker of the opposing team slammed a terror toward the Marines' third-sacker, one of those cannon-ball drives which is dubbed "too hot to handle" and scored as a hit.

The third-baseman touched it—rather, it touched the third-baseman, slamming against his ankle with a crack that could be heard to the right-field bleachers. Fracture, the doctor said, and it meant the lay-off of a month.

O'Leary tore his hair and raved. The third-sacker out of it, and not a good utility man left after putting Billy Pitt in on third! O'Leary cursed the Fates and the club's retrenchment policy. Pitt played a good game on third, but the Millers took the last two games of the series.

Then the Marines tackled the Millionaires, and the hoodoo refused to let them alone. Sam Fremont, the second-baseman, in swinging at a fast one, figured too closely and the ball smashed two of his fingers. Two weeks at the lowest calculation, said a heartless doctor, and the Marines dropped two of the next three games.

Then the Marines returned home for a series, with the fight close for first place and the team literally shot to pieces. O'Leary ruefully gazed at the standing:

	W.	L.	Pct.
Highlanders	70	48	.593
Millionaires	67	49	.578
Marines	69	51	.575
Oaks	66	51	.564
Panthers	58	58	.500
Millers	57	58	.496
Indians	46	74	.383
Grays	36	80	.310

The Highlanders led the league with only three and one-half games separating the first four clubs, and the Marines in the midst of a streak of ill luck. And their guests for the first four games of the home stay were the Panthers, the fast-moving aggregation which had won twenty of their last thirty games and risen to the top of the second division.

It was then, in a spirit of desperation, and while trying to buy a cracker-jack infielder, that O'Leary bethought himself of the little recruit whom he had tried out in the training season. He wired frantically to Birmingham for Conifer, who was held by the Barons under optional agreement, and received a telegram inside of two hours:

Report in time for Monday's game.

THE papers of Monday morning carried the pleasing news of Conifer's return. The sport-writers recalled the appearance of Conifer on the training trip, and they dug up his minor-league record. There was no doubt of the fact that he'd prove better than a green man at shortstop, especially as their only other possible utility man was threatened with a bad charley-horse.

Jimmy Conifer sought Miss Nettie Lorenz on his arrival in the city. She was delighted to see him and said so very frankly. As for Jimmy, he beamed.

"I'm nervous," he admitted, "but if I can grit through the first two or three innings of the first game, I'll show 'em. It's bad enough, you know, to have a job dependent on my showing in one game, but to have it mean that, and—and—*you*—Well, you understand, don't you?"

Abstractedly he brushed a trace of powder from the shoulder of his coat.

"O'Leary's peppery," continued Conifer. "And I can't say that I blame him much. I understand that he's dickering with the Panthers for Lefty Lewis—offering them fancy prices. He's just giving me a show because he owns me and he knows that I might make good. But he isn't in a mood to realize that I might be naturally nervous in my first major-league game, and the chances are that if I fall down he'll get plumb desperate and pay some fabulous price for a veteran. On the other hand, if I can get away with it—make good—he'll keep me, I'm sure."

Conifer was nervous as he rode alone to

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the grounds. It was a terrific strain for a young man to be shifted in a day from Class A ball to a place on a major-league team. He knew that the eyes of the manager, the players and of every fan in the grounds would be centered on him. He knew that every move, every play, would be criticized to the limit. He expected to have an off day for the same reason that few actors "get across" on a first night as they do later. But Conifer's boyish face was grim. The chance meant much to him.

After much argument at the gate, Zack let him into the club-room. He found O'Leary already there and in uniform. Within a few minutes Pitt, Shirley and Lincoln came, silent, depressed.

"'Lo, Conifer," greeted O'Leary. "Ready to play?"

"Yep."

"How y' feelin'?"

"Fit as a fiddle."

"Nervous?"

"No," he lied stoutly.

"Climb into Fremont's uniform. You're of a size, and it's just been through the laundry."

Conifer did as bidden, feeling the curious, appraising, not unfriendly stares of his team-mates. Overhead in the grandstand he could hear the tramp-tramp-tramp of the incoming crowds, as they filled tier after tier of seats. He discerned the strident calls of peanut and soft-drink venders, and outside the door he heard Manning, the veteran sport-writer whose picture decorates his column every evening, in conversation with Manager O'Leary.

"This guy Conifer come yet?" inquired the newspaper-man.

"Yep." Cheerlessly.

"You don't look happy over it?"

"Well, he's only an inexperienced kid—why should I?"

"S'pose he falls down, as he probably will?"

"Can't say! I've been trying to buy or steal Lefty Lewis, and I have lines out for——"

He lowered his voice, and Conifer heard no more.

But he had caught enough to forcibly drive home a realization of the fact that everything was dependent on his work that day. They all expected him to fail. It wasn't fair, he told himself fiercely—no man could make good under such trying conditions.

WHEN he trotted on to the field for preliminary practise he felt himself the cynosure of all eyes, but fortune favored him. The grounders slammed his way bounded evenly and could have been handled by an amateur. His throwing, as always, was good. And he blessed the smooth diamond, and prayed that he might get over his nervousness before the game became critically close.

The batteries were announced, Webb and Nelligan for the Panthers, and Beiger and Lincoln for the Marines. The man at the huge score-board mounted his ladder and posted the lineups:

PANTHERS.	MARINES.
Reilley, lf.	O'Leary, lf.
Masterson, 3b.	Pitt, 3b.
MacPherson, cf.	Collins, rf.
Donñelley, 1b.	Shirley, cf.
Seay, rf.	Werner, ss.
Nelligan, c.	Conifer, 2b.
Baird, 2b.	Bell, 1b.
Lewis, ss.	Lincoln, c.
Webb, p.	Beiger, p.

The Marines trotted into the field, and as O'Leary passed Jimmy he vouchsafed a "Buck up, kid! You gotta play ball today!"

Reilley, the first man up for the Panthers, walked. Masterson laid a neat bunt down the first-base line, but Bell who had been on the lookout for just such a play slammed it to Werner in time to catch Reilley. Conifer felt glad that he had not been forced to cover the base. Then MacPherson grounded out to Werner, Masterson reaching second on the play. Donñelley ended the inning by lining out to Shirley.

O'Leary, first man up for the Marines, popped an easy infield fly and retired to the bench in disgust, but Pitt, the next man, sent a daisy-cutter over second and reached first in safety amidst howls from the fans, who declared vociferously that the Marines' losing streak had ended. Collins, next up, also singled and Pitt went to third on the play. On the next ball pitched Collins took second. Then Shirley struck out and Werner drew a base on balls.

With two out and the bases full, Jimmy Conifer, white-faced and frightened, selected his bat from the row in front of the bench and advanced tremblingly to the plate.

A hit meant two runs. The fans howled encouragement. It was a ticklish situation for a début.

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Webb grinned derisively from the pitcher's box. Masterson rallied him from third.

"Fan the busher," he counseled. "He couldn't hit a balloon with an air-gun. Put 'em around his collar-button!"

"Give 'im a chancst," begged Lefty Lewis. "Give th' kid a chancst!"

O'Leary watched silently from the coaching line near third. Conifer, jaw set and eyes blazing, clutched his bat tightly until the veins stood out blue against the flesh. Webb wound up and the ball whizzed over.

"Stri-i-ke!" bawled the umpire. Some one in the bleachers laughed raucously, heartlessly.

"Told yuh!" exulted Masterson.

"Let 'im hit it," pleaded Lewis again.

Again the ball, fairly burning the air with its speed. Conifer swung wildly and missed the ball six inches.

"Str-i-ke *tuh!*"

"Take 'im out!" screamed an urchin, and O'Leary cursed under his breath.

The runners were played dangerously off their bases. Conifer breathed more easily. He'd have a second's respite anyway. Certainly Webb would waste a couple now.

But he didn't know the artistry of the majors. The next ball didn't even curve. It shot across the heart of the platter, and Conifer stood staring at it as though petrified.

"T'ree strikes—an' *out!*" roared the umpire.

In a daze Conifer dropped his bat and shuffled to the field. With the bases full he had fanned—a second Casey! Only dimly did he hear the disapproving roar of the thousands in the stands, only vaguely did he sense the fact that they were panning him unmercifully. But he did hear the sneer of Freddy Shirley who snapped "Busher!" as he trotted by en route to his outfield post.

SEAY started the ball rolling for the Panthers by singling sharply, but he was nabbed at second by Werner when he tried to steal. Werner gazed pityingly at the recruit on second.

"Buck up, kid!" he said kindly. "This means your job. You should have covered the base then."

His job—his job! Always his job! Why didn't some one forget that for a while? Why couldn't he forget it? There was Nelligan at the bat, big, husky Nelligan, the catcher.

Conifer heard the crack of bat and ball, he saw the white sphere ricochetting toward him across the skinned diamond. Frantically he shoved out his gloved hand, and the ball stuck!

For the fraction of a second he held it, while through his head there flashed the thought "I've made good!" Then he heard Bell's voice roaring through the void and saw Nelligan speeding toward first, close now, closer. . . . Quick as a flash he transferred the ball to his right hand and in a frenzy slammed it to first.

Even as the sphere left his hand he heard the muttered "Hell!" of Skimpy Werner and the roar of abuse from the spectators. In mute horror he saw Nelligan cross first and flash for second, and he watched Bell scramble after the ball which he had knocked down by a mighty leap—a leap of desperation.

The official scorer made a dot in the error column opposite the name of Conifer!

Meanwhile Nelligan had rounded second and was headed for third. Werner had instinctively run toward first and Pitt had deserted his post at third. Jimmy dashed to cover third base.

Like a bullet came the ball from Bell, whistling across the diamond on a line, and close to the ground where it would be easy to push it into the ribs of a sliding runner.

As the ball struck Conifer's glove the big catcher hurtled through the air for a hook slide. He was out.

The ball rolled from Conifer's glove and slipped away, back of the third-base line!

The scorer tabulated another error for Conifer!

As Jimmy scrambled after the ball, almost demoralized, Sandy MacPherson roared instructions at Nelligan.

"Home—yuh big ice-cart!" he howled. "Home! *Home!* An'—*sli-i-i-de!*"

Down the line dashed Nelligan, fairly tearing the turf with his spikes. Conifer shot the ball to Lincoln.

A weird shriek of horror from the fans! The ball sped four feet over the head of the veteran catcher! The official scorer marked another error against Conifer's name!

"A world's record," he announced drily to his contemporaries. "Three errors on a single grounder!"

The youngster was miserable when he

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returned to his post on second, so patently miserable that the vitriol-tongued Werner didn't have the heart to say a word. The inning ended, and Conifer watched the boy post the score:

PANTHERS	0 1
MARINES	0

"Some second-sacker yuh got!" called Seay to a bleacherite.

"Want him to strengthen y'r team?" flashed a wit swiftly.

The spectators roared with laughter. It was such a subtle bit of repartee! Conifer heard, and he heard the kid who dinned into his ears the shrill—

"Back to th' bushes f'r y'rs, Connifrey!"

IN THE sixth, Bell walked, stole second, and he scored on Lincoln's single. Then Beiger slammed the ball against the left-field fence for three bags and Lincoln scored, and the fans forgot their kid shortstop and howled themselves into a frenzy of joy. The scoreboard looked better now:

PANTHERS	010	000
MARINES	000	002

In the eighth inning Conifer leaned against one of Webb's choicest offerings and drove it over third for one base, but the fans had not yet forgiven him his fiasco of the second inning. Two men were down, and Bell ended things by flying out to MacPherson.

In the ninth the Panthers tied things up with a double and a single in rapid succession. Came the tenth and passed without the semblance of a tally. Since the second inning Conifer had handled every chance prettily. He had regained his nerve and his poise, but he knew that he was too late. The Panthers opened the eleventh with a single and a base on balls, but the runners died on their bases.

Conifer was calmly desperate when he selected his bat in the eleventh. He was first man up, and it was rapidly growing dark. The score-board was getting filled:

PANTHERS	010	000	001	00
MARINES	000	002	000	0

"Lemme see if you can't do something," snapped O'Leary. "We gotta win this game!"

The shoulders of the recruit went back and he approached the plate springily. He had probably lost the game for his team by his awful work in the second inning. If he only had a chance now for a startling play. . . . But he realized that such chances do not always come for the asking.

"Some men make Opportunity!" he had heard his father say once. And he smiled.

The Panther infield was playing well back, as was the outfield.

"'Lo, Busher!" greeted Webb.

"Hullo!" growled Conifer. He was beginning to feel himself again.

The ball came over, a deceptive hop, and Conifer let it pass.

"Str-i-ke one!"

"Kin yuh beat it?" disgustedly questioned Collins of no one in particular.

"Mebbe," started O'Leary. He was longing for a hard-hitting emergency batter—a luxury he did not possess.

Conifer let the next one by, and the umpire called it a ball. The next, too, was a ball.

Webb wound up and loosed a high incurve. Conifer coolly stepped back and let is pass.

"Ba-a-all *t'ree!*"

It was up to Webb now. The next one *had* to come over. Conifer knew, too, that by all the set rules of batting his play was to let it go by. The infield settled farther back. Conifer gripped his bat more tightly.

The ball flashed across the pan like lightning, and straight as an arrow. Like a flash Conifer shortened his bat—and bunted!

Conifer was running low, his feet fairly twinkling. O'Leary gasped. The fans had not yet fully grasped the daring of the play. Masterson swooped down on the ball and sped it to Donnelley. Conifer flashed across the base and the umpire motioned him safe, palm of his hand down.

"Good Lord!" muttered O'Leary. "Th' dam' busher got away with it!"

BELL stepped to the plate for a sacrifice. Webb knew that with the game as close as it was, Conifer would wait for a bunt, and he made a pitch-out, hoping vaguely to draw Bell and yet play safe on the runner.

Conifer, who did not know the signals—and who was glad of the fact—was off like a streak, and Nelligan, the catcher, who had known that it was to be a pitch-out and

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therefore not the sort of ball on which to steal, was unprepared for a quick throw. Conifer had outguessed them again!

The recruit leaped high into the air and crashed into second a full three seconds before the delayed ball reached Lewis's hands. He stood upright on the base and brushed his clothes. Lewis grinned sheepishly and tossed the ball to Webb.

There came a roar, a shriek—half of fear and half of joy, from the spectators. O'Leary jumped to his feet like a madman. For Conifer was shooting for third, running as he had never run before—setting all precedent at naught!

Billy Pitt was dancing like a dervish and howling advice which was drowned in the thunderous tide of excitement from the thousands. The blasé sport-writers in the press-box forgot their pose of indifference and joined in the general hue and cry. Conifer sped on.

He slid far to one side of the base and away past it, his foot hooking to the bag before he was touched with the ball.

"Safe!" tremoloed the excited arbiter, and the stands went wild. A few innings before Conifer had been a dub and a bonehead—now he was a wonder, a hero!

Conifer paid no attention to the screams of the crowd. He was smiling grimly—himself again. He paid no heed to the coacher. Bell signaled that he was going to hit it out, but Conifer did not try to read the signal.

To put at rest the panicky fears of the Panthers he took a very short lead off third and did not move when the first ball went wide of the pan. Nelligan returned the ball lazily—and Conifer was suddenly galvanized into action.

O'Leary swore afterward that Conifer ran at an eight-second gait. No one was quite clear as to what really did happen.

They saw a streak whirring in to home. They saw Webb shoot the ball to Nelligan in a panic—they saw Conifer's lithe figure go into the air for the slide when apparently only two-thirds of the way between third and the plate—they saw a cloud of dust and a whirl of arms and legs and man. And then, from the mixup, the umpire raised his body.

"*S-a-a-a-fe!*" he screamed, and the crowd went mad!

Conifer limped to the bench. O'Leary was the first to grab his hand.

"Y'r a dam' fool," he chortled. "But any man with a nerve like yours can hold a job with th' Marines!"

The papers enthused the next day, and together Jimmy and The Girl gazed at the mass of figures which constituted the tabloid record of Jimmy's major-league début:

MARINES.

	AB	R	H	PO	A	E
O'Leary, lf.	6	0	0	2	0	0
Pitt, 3b.	5	0	1	1	2	0
Collins, rf.	6	0	1	1	0	0
Shirley, cf.	5	0	0	1	0	0
Werner, ss.	5	0	0	2	4	1
Conifer, 2b.	3	1	2	2	4	3
Bell, 1b.	4	1	1	17	1	0
Lincoln, c.	4	1	1	6	3	0
Beiger, p.	3	0	1	1	1	0
	41	3	7	33	15	4

PANTHERS.

	AB	R	H	PO	A	E
Reilley, lf.	5	1	2	1	0	0
Masterson, 3b.	4	0	1	1	4	1
MacPherson, cf.	5	0	1	1	0	0
Donnelley, 1b.	5	0	0	14	1	0
Seay, rf.	5	0	1	2	0	0
Nelligan, c.	4	1	1	6	3	0
Baird, 2b.	4	0	1	2	3	0
Lewis, ss.	4	0	0	2	7	0
Webb, p.	4	0	0	1	2	0
	40	2	7	30	20	1

SCORE BY INNINGS.

PANTHERS.	010	000	001	00	2
MARINES.	000	002	000	01	3

No one out when winning run was made.

SUMMARY

Three-base hit—Beiger. Two-base hit—Reilley. Sacrifice hits—Conifer, MacPherson, Nelligan, Beiger. Stolen bases—Conifer (3), Reilley, Baird, Shirley. Double plays—Pitt to Werner to Bell. Bases on balls—Off Beiger 2; Off Webb 3. Struck out—by Beiger 5, by Webb 4. Time of game—2.05. Umpire—Goodwin.

"It don't look like much on paper," commented Jimmy drily, "but——"

"It's one of those things which have to be *seen*," finished the girl happily.

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THE TESTING OF GASPARD DURANT

By Henry Oyen

GASPARD DURANT drove home the last boundary-stake marking the rich copper claims which he and his American partner, Limpy Hicks, had just located, threw the hatchet high in the air, and with a boyish yell of delight seized Hicks in his arms and proceeded to waltz promiscuously over a good share of the western slope of the Caribou Valley.

"We have done the biz, this time, Limpy!" he chanted. "This is what we've been hunting for. When the Copper Company see what we got here they'll pay us our price. We'll be rich, rich! And Nina Dubuc no longer will say I must wait before we get married!"

Gaspard was twenty-five, six feet tall, as quick and strong on his feet as a bobcat, and drunk on the intoxicating nectar that youth generates within itself when it sees its dreams fulfilled. Hicks was over forty, five feet six, with his left leg shortened two inches by a bullet-shattered knee-cap; and bitter experience had taken much of the prospector's natural optimism from him.

He struggled and swore in vain in the bear-like arms of his big partner. Gaspard danced on. With a sudden twist of his lame leg, Hicks skilfully knocked the boy's feet from under him, fell, sprang up, seized a pick and placed himself on the defensive.

"Keep away from me, keep away from me, you great big calf-moose, you!" he bellowed as Gaspard, laughing, sprang to his feet. "Don't you try to drag me around any more or I'll drive you one, I will, I swear I will! Keep off!"

Gaspard, still laughing, ducked in, jerked the pick away, grasped Limpy again, and once more was off on his bear-like dance of triumph. It was too much to ask of a youth of his temperament that he stand still under the circumstances. He swung Limpy's one hundred and fifty pounds into the air and danced until Limpy once more skilfully threw him.

"Listen now, you big, half-baked lump of bear-meat!" said the older man seriously when Gaspard's wild antics had ceased. "Cut out the honky-tonk and listen to your Uncle Limpy. You're dancing before the fiddler has been paid. You've got no more excuse for tearing your shirt from joy than a man has who's happened to hit a straight faro-box. We've started our play, but it's got a long ways to go before we begin to cash. This stuff isn't ours to sell or work until you've been down to Fort Gregory and filed our claim-papers and got our certificates salted away inside your shoe.

"When you've done that," he went on, "and done it before any one else has done it, then you've got a license to get foolish. Until then hang on to yourself. I've seen too many plays slip up on the last deal to crow before the papers are filed. Take a look at the north."

Gaspard looked. It was late in October. The weather had been too fine to continue

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as it was in that latitude; and all men knew that the White Wind, the first terrible blizzard which announced the coming of six months' Winter to the Caribou Valley, soon would come and come hard.

Far away toward the northern horizon a sinister black cloud had streaked itself across the blue sky. In the southern end of the valley where Gaspard and Hicks were standing the sun was shining bright and warm, but on the crest of Caribou Range, in the north, a haze was forming, blotting out the sharp edges of the highest peaks and sending a chill down even to where the two prospectors stood.

"Snow," said Gaspard quietly.

"Snow," agreed Hicks in the same tone of voice.

They looked at each other.

"Perhaps it is only a flurry," said Gaspard.

"Perhaps," agreed Hicks. "And perhaps it's the real thing—the old White Wind."

Without another word they gathered up their tools and started down the trail to their cabin in the little settlement on the Caribou River below. As they walked, the black cloud spread farther over the heavens. With appalling swiftness it came rolling down from the north, filling the world with its chill and darkness. Presently it reached the bright afternoon sun, blotted it out, and the valley which a short time before had been a picture of a cheerful Autumn day suddenly became enveloped in the somber atmosphere of far northern Winter.

Before the pair had gone a mile the first hard-frozen flakes of the blizzard were whirling about them; and when they struck the Caribou, a mile above the settlement, the brawling waters of the stream had taken on the dead black color which, to the knowing, presages the coming of a Winter storm.

"It's the real thing, I guess," said Hicks, limping on ahead. "And if it's a hard one there'll be no fun getting down to Fort Gregory for our papers."

"Pooh!" laughed Gaspard. His exuberance had returned and he was merry again. "What is the difference, old croaker? A day, two days, a week, two weeks even, what does it matter? The claims are safe. No one else is prospecting in this part of the valley. No one knows that we have found what we were after. No one shall know.

"So long as the storm continues, a day, a week, two weeks, no one will go out in the hills. Then as soon as the wind quits blowing I will rush down to Fort Gregory. Eighty miles—I can do it in two days when the going is good. Yes, my dear croaking partner, two days after the weather lets me start I will be in Fort Gregory with the certificates salted in my shoe, and our fortune is made!"

Hicks snorted.

"If it's a hard one it may last for two weeks," he persisted. "Two weeks, sitting with our hands in our pockets, and all that big bare vein up there on the side-hill with nothing to show it's ours. How do we know what can happen in two weeks? If there were dogs at the settlement I'd mush out today—storm or no storm."

"And that would be a very foolish thing to do," rejoined Gaspard. "Especially now when we have the game beaten and life is good to us. Men do not always live who go out in the White Wind, my partner. There are the bones of brave but reckless men on the trail to Fort Gregory. I am brave, you can not deny that, my Limpy, but not reckless. I do not wish to risk dying—not now, when Nina Dubuc no longer will say we must wait to marry."

Limpy Hicks laughed bitterly. Women did not look with favor upon a man with a miserably crippled leg.

"You talk pretty confidently about Nina Dubuc," he said. "Like the claim, you count her yours before the papers are filed. You don't know any more about women than you do about anything else."

"No, not about women; only about one—Nina Dubuc," replied Gaspard good-humoredly. "That is all I want to know. And she is to be mine when I show her that I have something—and now I have it. She has given her word."

"The word of a woman!"

"Partner!" said Gaspard warningly.

"Oh, don't fly off the handle, boy," laughed the older man. "I'm not saying a word against Nina Dubuc."

"No, not even you would dare that," said Gaspard.

"She's too darn good for you—too much of a woman for you—if it comes to that."

"Granted. But she does not think so."

Hicks nodded.

"I know. You're the only man of her age in the settlement. She's lived here all her life with her father, Old Pierre. The white

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men that she's seen have been old sourdoughs, like me, or old trappers, like Pierre.

"You were the first young, decent-looking white man to cross her trail, and you happened to hit it just as she was turning into a woman. That's why you've won her promise; you've had things all your own way. If there was another white man of your age and looks in the game, well, my boy, if there's anything in a woman's eyes, Nina Dubuc would have a look at both of you before she gave her promise. And she'd take the man who showed strongest, not the one who was honest or square. That's women."

"And that is good enough for me." Gaspard smote his big chest. "Am I not strong, my Limpy? Do you not think I could take and keep my woman against any man? Have you ever seen one stronger—*Sacré nom de Dieu!* What is this?"

IN A bend of the Caribou, directly before them, a silver birch was grown out over the water, its lower branches submerged in the stream. In the tangle of branches was caught a birch-bark canoe, and in the stern of the canoe, face downward, one arm thrown helplessly over the gunwale, lay a great figure of a man.

From the position of the canoe it was obvious that it had lodged against the birch but a few seconds before, and also it was obvious that in a few seconds more the craft would capsize and cast its unconscious human freight into the brawling river.

With a leap Gaspard was in the water. He quickly freed the canoe from the tangled branches, swung it to the shore, and with a mighty heave dragged the man out and laid him on the ground.

"*Sacré nom de Dieu!*" he said, panting. "That is a piece of a man for you, Limpy. He is three inches taller than me and fifty pounds heavier."

As he lay flat and helpless on the bank the rescued man appeared colossal. As Gaspard said, he must have been taller by three inches and heavier by fifty pounds than the young giant himself. A flaming red beard and a heavy head of hair of the same color surrounded the huge face. It was not a pretty face. The nose was too flat for a white man; the forehead ran back too sharply from the eyebrows; the eyes were set too closely together; and the upper lip was slightly uplifted, showing the points of two fang-like teeth. But the size of the head, the sense of power that reeked from it even in unconsciousness, dominated the first impression and made the two partners stare in wonder.

"Great Scott! It's Red George!" cried Hicks suddenly, recognizing the flaming beard that had spread the fame of its owner wide over the country to the northward. "A queer fix for him to be in—the man who bragged that nothing could get or stop him."

"Red George!" repeated Gaspard with something like awe in his tone.

He, too, had heard of the man. In the barren lands beyond the Caribou Range, where the rivers begin to flow north toward the Arctic, the name of Red George was a thing to conjure with, and the fame of him had spread southward into the Caribou Valley.

Some said he was an outlaw who with rifle against spear and flint-lock took tribute from the hunting and trapping of the deluded Crees of the region. Others said that he was the chief of the tribe. But all agreed that he was boss of that district, and that he took his toll of meat and hides and women; and no man was strong enough to say him nay.

Gaspard kneeled swiftly and raised the great, red head to his knee.

"Ah, here it is, Limpy!" he cried, as the matted hair fell back, revealing a bullet wound above the temple. "A bullet has creased him. He's still alive."

Hicks nodded gloomily as the young man tore the handkerchief from the wounded man's neck and proceeded to bind up the wound.

"Sure, he's alive," said he. "It would take more than that to kill an elephant like him."

"We've got to get him down to the settlement," said Gaspard when the bandage was on. "He'd never wake up in the storm that's coming. Give me a hand, Limpy. Into the canoe with him and get him indoors as soon as we can."

Hicks did not move to offer a hand.

"I tell you what, Gaspard Durant," he rasped out, "if what they say about this man is half true, the right thing to do would be to leave him right here and let the White Wind finish the work that that bullet missed. He's no luck to anybody, Red

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George. And probably the man who creased him had a darn good reason."

Gaspard only laughed.

"You talk queer today, my Limpy," said he, as he tugged and lifted the big figure back into the bottom of the canoe. "You are not yourself. It is not Limpy Hicks who talks of leaving a hurt man to die on the trail. Catch hold there, my partner. You and I—are we the kind to ask what kind of quarrel it was that the man was hurt in? No! It is enough to see that he is hurt, that he bleeds, and that he will die here but for us. Help me now; that is right. Now get in the bow; there is only one paddle, you see. So; steady; now we go home."

Laughing and cajoling, he forced Hicks into the canoe and with careful strokes of the paddle sent the heavily loaded craft out into the current. The wounded man did not stir. He was apparently unconscious from the combined shock and loss of blood, and he lay like a log in the bottom while the canoe swung around bend after bend and at last, under the coaxing of the paddle in Gaspard's hands, slid through the thickening snow-fall up to the landing-place of the settlement.

Like a log he lay as Hicks and Gaspard again lifted him from the canoe and laid him upon the bank, while the people of the settlement came running up with cries of astonishment. Then he stirred. He moved slowly from head to toe, like a bear that is awakening. He raised his great arms slowly. He opened his eyes. And he looked straight up into the eyes of Nina Dubuc who was steadying herself against the rising blizzard and looking down at him.

"Where am I?" he murmured faintly, closing his eyes.

"At the settlement of Pierre Dubuc," replied Nina.

The man opened his eyes and looked up at her again.

"I believe I am hurt?" he said with a smile.

"*Sacre!* I believe so too!" cried Nina. "Oh, you men! Would you let a helpless stranger lie here and die among us without help? Pick him up. He must be taken out of this snow at once. Bear him in."

"Where shall we bear him, Nina?" asked Gaspard, as with three other men he helped raise the giant from the wet ground.

"Where should he go but to the house of the head man of the settlement?" demanded the black-eyed Nina. "You will bear him into the house of Pierre Dubuc—into the house of my father."

And as the little procession set off toward Dubuc's big cabin, Limpy Hicks looked once more toward the threatening north and shook his head.

II

LIMPY'S forebodings soon came true. Red George had lain in Pierre Dubuc's spare bunk less than an hour when the White Wind struck the settlement in earnest. It broke with the accumulated ferocity of weeks.

It was like a whitened tornado, a moving, whirling, shrieking, twisting mass of white, moving down the valley at sixty miles an hour, wiping the pleasant signs of Autumn from the land with an angry hand and clamping home the grip of Winter with a grimness that no one could mistake. The pelting, hard-frozen crystals cut the skin till the blood came; the swirling wind sucked the air out of the nostrils and left one gasping for breath.

At its coming the people of the settlement ran for their cabins and began to plug the openings which the heat of Summer had made in the mud-chinked walls, and through which now the wind and snow were whistling. For a day, two days, a week, two weeks possibly, they would be snowed in.

The White Wind while it raged made the outdoor world untenable, and the people of Caribou Valley bowed their heads to its mastery and sat close-huddled to their fires, waiting for the storm to cease.

In their little one-room cabin, next to the big cabin of Pierre Dubuc, Limpy Hicks and Gaspard Durant lighted their pipes after the early evening meal and smoked and listened to the uncanny wailing of the storm outside. At times so mighty was the impact of wind and snow that the stanchly built cabin, its log walls reaching a scant four feet above the ground-level, shuddered and creaked as if about to be wrenched apart. Hicks shook his head and muttered.

"It is the real thing, all right," he said. "Old Mr. White Wind is certainly showing us what he can do this time. Heaven knows how long it will be before you can make Fort Gregory and file our claims. I don't like it, I tell you, boy; I don't feel lucky."

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Gaspard shrugged his shoulders and said:

"There is no reasoning with you when you are in this gloomy mood, my Limpy. You preach bad luck and there is nothing but good luck before us. Does any one else in this world know that we have found anything? No. Only you and me. And the first other person who shall know will be the Commissioner at Fort Gregory when I step into his office and hand him these descriptions."

He slapped the pocket in his money-belt where the paper with the descriptions of their claims was hidden.

"Well, see that you don't tell anybody else, either," grumbled Limpy. "Snowed-in here as we may be for a week or two, the thing may leak out. That's what I'm afraid of. Afraid that somebody'll get next and beat us to the Commissioner's. Things leak out when you're snowed-in."

"No, no, my Limpy!" laughed Gaspard. "Not when it is only two partners like you and I who know them. And even if some one should learn what we have? Is there a man in this settlement, do you think, my partner, who could reach Fort Gregory through this White Wind?"

"I don't feel lucky about this Red George," retorted Hicks grimly. "He's a hard one and a bad one. I'd feel better if he wasn't here."

"Red George lies in the house of Pierre Dubuc, with a hole in his head," retorted Gaspard. "It is not like Limpy Hicks, my partner, to fear a man who is shot up and on his back."

"He isn't shot up enough to change his style any, I tell you," snapped Hicks. "He's a hard one, that guy, and a bad one! If I was you, son, I wouldn't feel any too good about his staying in the same house with Nina."

Gaspard arose and knocked the fire from his pipe and laughed.

"I shall take your hint, my Limpy," he chuckled. "I shall step in and guard my Nina—Nina who would knife any man but myself who dared to speak a familiar word to her. I love you, my dear partner, but tonight you are not company for me."

Buttoning his mackinaw to the chin and pulling his fur cap far down over his face he flung open the door and dashed through the storm to the door of the Dubuc cabin. The distance was little more than a score of steps, but in that short space the wind buffeted and tore at Gaspard so that he was breathless ere he was over.

"*Sacré nom de Dieu!*" he panted as he stumbled into Dubuc's. "The White Wind is after lives tonight. It is well to be under a roof in a night like this."

OLD Pierre Dubuc sat in one corner of the living-room and smoked in silence, scarcely looking up at the young man's entrance. In another corner sat Nina, busy with her sewing, and with a lighting-up of the eyes Gaspard crossed the room to her side. Nature, and the life of ease which she lived because of her father's position in the settlement, had been kind to Nina Dubuc.

The light from the flickering hanging-lamp shone on rounded arms that had never known the strain of toil, and on eyes which gleamed with an imperiousness that told that their owner never had known any will but her own. It was not for nothing that people said—"The man who tames Nina Dubuc must be strong, indeed." And the sight of her made young Gaspard Durant half mad with hope and pride. He forgot Limpy Hicks' warning; he forgot everything but the girl.

"Nina," he whispered, throwing himself into a seat by her side, "we have found it, Limpy and I! We are rich. We have located the copper vein which we knew must be some place in the valley. It is ours. Mine is yours. Ah, Nina," he continued, raising his voice, "we need wait no longer now. I have the fortune to offer you which you deserve."

The eyes of the girl flashed at him a look which drove straight to Gaspard's heart. Then a trace of annoyance swept over her face.

"The stranger sleeps," she said with a nod toward the skin partition behind them. "Not so loud."

She looked up at Gaspard, saw that her speech had disconcerted him as she wished, and said:

"Is it truly so, what you tell me? You and the American have found what you sought?"

Forgetting entirely the speech he had had with Hicks but a few minutes before, Gaspard eagerly poured out the story of the location of the claims. The gleaming, black eyes, the red lips, the rounded forearms of

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Nina were before his eyes. The words came easily to his excited tongue.

He described the painful, methodical search which he and Limpy Hicks had prosecuted, the careful, inch-by-inch scratching of the valley for the big vein which the signs had told them must somewhere be near. Then finally the day of triumph, the reward for their many unrewarded days of toil.

"And it is rich, I tell you, Nina; richer even than Limpy and I had hoped it would be," concluded Gaspard. "The Copper Company has sought this vein often, and it will pay any sum that Limpy and I may ask."

Nina's gaudily moccasined foot beat an impatient tattoo on the floor, as the young man vaunted his pride and confidence.

"It is rich, is it, Gaspard?" she said with a dangerous purr in her voice. "And so you come here with your story—to buy me. Is that it?"

"Nina!"

"Do you think I, the daughter of Pierre Dubuc, who have never known master, am to be bought, like a Cree squaw, or a husky-dog?" purred the girl, peering at him between half-closed lids. "Do you think I am the kind of woman to go with a man—and stay with him—because he has a large price to offer? Eh?"

"Nina! It was you who said you would not marry a poor man. It was only for you that I have worked, only for you that I am glad we won."

Nina nodded slowly, still watching him with eyes half hidden behind the lids.

"The daughter of Pierre Dubuc could not marry a poor man. I said that. I meant it. A poor man is one who can not take the riches which the country offers. Therefore no fit mate for me. But he must be strong, too, very strong; so strong that there is none stronger."

Gaspard leaned over her fiercely.

"Have you seen any man stronger than I?" he demanded.

The soft black eyes looked at him speculatively.

"I wonder," she murmured, but loud enough for him to hear. "I wonder if I have not—since the big stranger came."

"Nina, Nina! Do not attempt to play with me," warned Gaspard in a tone of ice. "You do not think I am the man to take such talk lightly, do you? Then do not go on with it. You have promised to wed me. Your father, Pierre, has promised the day shall be when I have something to offer you. That day will be as soon as I have been down to Fort Gregory and filed on our claims."

"Then you have not filed—the claims are not yours now?"

"We have not filed. It is a matter of form. Men do not try to make Fort Gregory in such weather. When the White Wind grows more easy, then I go. When I return you will be mine."

The girl smiled a little scornfully.

"You do not seem very impatient, Gaspard," she laughed. "You profess to long for the happy day, and yet you make no move to bring it to pass. A strong man, does he let small things like storms keep him from happiness?"

"A strong man is not a foolish man," replied Gaspard, "and it would be only a foolish man who would put himself on the Fort Gregory trail in company with the White Wind. A strong man does not run the risk of losing a treasure like you, my Nina; a strong man is a man who can wait."

He drew the claim descriptions from his belt and waved them over her head.

"These papers, and you, my Nina, and my life—they are too precious to risk on the Fort Gregory trail in a storm which no man could live through."

Nina Dubuc caught Gaspard's eyes and led them toward the skin partition beyond which slept Red George.

"I wonder," she purred, "I wonder if that big Red George could not live through the White Wind."

"Nina!"

"I wonder if he would let a storm keep him from filing those papers and returning to claim—me!"

"Nina," said Gaspard with new seriousness, "this is child's talk; but it is not well to go on with it. I know you are playing with me, but I do not like it. You have not found me a man who can be played with lightly? No. Else you would not have given me your promise. We will have no more of this talk of Red George. I saved his life; I would not care to have to take it away from him. Now, Nina mine, we will forget all this, and I will tell you that never have you been so beautiful as tonight. Is not that better?"

His boyish laugh rang out as he passed

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an arm behind her and drew her close to his side. She yielded, for the arm was long and strong, and Gaspard was good to look upon.

"But do not forget, my Gaspard," warned Nina, "I am not your wife yet."

III

NEXT morning, after breakfast, Nina stood in the living-room of the cabin and looked out of the single window at the pelting storm that raged outside. All night the White Wind had done its best to cover the settlement under drifts of snow, and with the coming of daylight each moment seemed to increase its fury.

There would be no let-up of the storm for days, if the signs were to be depended upon, and the settlement stoically accepted the fate of being snowed-in.

Nina was alone in the cabin save for Red George, who slumbered in the bunk behind the skin partition. Pierre Dubuc had awakened the big stranger in the morning, had looked at his wound and seen that it was healing, and had brought food. Red George had accepted his attentions humbly and with many thanks. He explained that some one had shot at him from behind while he was paddling down the river; that was all he knew about his mishap. Then he fell back into slumber again.

"He is still weak, that man," said Pierre as he prepared to rush through the storm to a neighbor's cabin for a bit of talk. "When he is strong he must be moved. Gaspard Durant will not be pleased that he stays under this roof."

Nina shrugged her shoulders. Now, as she watched the terrible force of the storm, the whitened, frozen world which had been turned from Autumn to Winter overnight, she thought of Gaspard again and shrugged her shoulders once more. Gaspard Durant to her had been the strongest man in the world, until the big red stranger came. And now——

A moccasined footstep on the floor behind her brought Nina's attention from the window in a flash. In the door in the skin partition, huge, dominant, masterful, stood Red George. The bandage was off his head; his red beard and hair seemed as an aureole about him; and he smiled.

"I have come far to look upon you, Nina Dubuc," he said easily. "Far in the north I heard tales of Nina, the beautiful, the untamed. Yesterday, beyond the Caribous, I left a woman to come to see if what men said of you was true. That woman it was who gave me this wound; she, too, had heard of Nina Dubuc and she knew where I was going. Now I have looked upon you. Men lied. They said you were to wed a man of this settlement. They did not know. I have seen, I have looked into your eyes. I know that Nina Dubuc will mate only with the strongest man that comes to her. That is me. In your heart you know I am the strong man you have been dreaming of."

Nina stood quite still by the window, but her right hand sought something in her bosom.

"M'sieu, if men have talked of me perhaps they have told you how I can throw the knife," she said quietly, as she drew the long, sharp throwing-knife from her bodice. "You will not come any nearer to me; I could scarcely miss your throat if I tried at this distance."

Red George threw back his great head and laughed deeply under his red beard.

"The purring lynx with the claws of steel!" he chuckled. "Fit mate for me are you, Nina Dubuc. Already you fear me; yet you will fight back till you are tamed. That is just as I would have you."

"Have me!" laughed the girl. "You do not know——"

"Listen," commanded the giant. "I know that you are promised to Gaspard Durant. You think I slept last night when that boy talked to you. Hah! I do not sleep when there are things I wish to hear. I heard all that he had to tell about his claim. I heard also that you felt scorn for him when he would not brave the trail to Fort Gregory against the White Wind. Then I knew that it was good that I have come. For then I knew that you were waiting for the strong man—the man whom nothing could stand against—the one you dreamed of, though you were promised to young Durant."

The bulk of the giant seemed to fill the room. He towered above Nina, whose eyes sought the floor. Despite her warning he came closer to her, and the girl's breath came faster as she listened to his barbarous love-making.

A smile came over the face of Red George. He knew the signs. He was winning this woman as he had won many others before her. Suddenly Nina lifted her eyes, sweeping

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him with a look of appraisal from foot to head.

"And you?" she said speculatively. "Would you not let the White Wind keep you from Fort Gregory?"

"I let nothing keep me from what I want," he replied.

"Pooh!" She tossed her head in scorn. "Why do you not answer my question?"

"If I had anything to go to Fort Gregory for I would not let the White Wind or the Black Devil keep me from going," he replied steadily. "But why should I go; you are here?"

The girl laughed.

"And you, what have you to offer for the hand of the daughter of Pierre Dubuc?" she demanded. "A hunter's hut beyond the hills? Do you think Nina Dubuc fancies such lowly fare?"

"I have myself," said Red George. "That is enough——"

"Have you, for instance, a copper claim which will make you rich?" interposed the girl slyly.

They stood looking at each other in silence for a moment, and the man's eyes widened with admiration.

"You devil!" he murmured between set teeth. "You beautiful, wild she-devil! You speak as should speak the mate of Red George. No, Nina; I have no copper claim. But another man in this settlement has; therefore I can get. I thank you for those words."

He began to stride up and down the room, chuckling with delight.

"So that is what you wish, is it, my beautiful lynx?" he muttered. "Poor Gaspard Durant!"

The girl watched him as if fascinated, a trifle fearful, apparently, of the tempest she had loosed.

"What—what do you intend to do?" she asked. "You do not know where the claims are. You can not go to Fort Gregory in this weather——"

"Can not?" he growled, suddenly turning on her. "Who are you to say that I can not go through the White Wind?"

"No man can," she taunted.

"I can," he said proudly. "I will! As for the locations of the claims, the boy Durant has the descriptions, has he not? I heard him when he showed them to you last night. Well, what another man has Red George can get."

"And if you had the descriptions you would go at once to file them, before Gaspard?"

"I will have them and I will go," was his reply. "Where is this Durant's cabin?"

He snatched up a fur cap and started for the door.

"No!" cried the girl, stretching forth her hand. "I will not have any fighting in this settlement."

He paused, and she stood watching him, her bosom heaving. For many seconds she seemed to be debating. Red George watched her and smiled.

"It is a fair test," she said suddenly. "Gaspard Durant can not go through the White Wind. If you can do what he can not do you are the stronger. And the man I wed must be the strongest of all. Therefore—I will give you those descriptions. Gaspard entrusted them to me last night. Then you will be even, Gaspard and you. The man who goes to Fort Gregory first will be the man for me."

"Give them to me, then," said Red George curtly. "Let us have done with talk. I am impatient to start."

With a smile on her lips Nina slipped into her own room at one end of the cabin and locked the door behind her. Red George busied himself while she was gone by stuffing his pockets with food from the table and by appropriating a pair of snow-shoes and a rifle that hung on the wall.

He made sure that the magazine of the rifle was full of cartridges. When Nina emerged from her room he stood, capped and mittened, ready for the trail.

"The descriptions?" he said in a tone of command.

Nina laid two slips of paper on the table and turned away.

"I should not do it," she began.

"Perhaps by doing so you keep me from killing Durant," interrupted the giant.

He looked closely at the descriptions. He was miner enough to see that they faithfully described two mineral claims, located by one Hicks and one Durant, in the southern end of the Caribou Valley. He knew women, did Red George; and by the heaving bosom of this one he knew that she was his.

"Good," he said, thrusting the papers inside his belt. "I will be back in four days. When I come, remember, you will go with me and be mine."

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Without another look at her he pulled down his cap, threw open the door and, like a great bear emerging from its cave, threw himself out into the storm. From the window Nina saw him hurling himself southward through the pelting snow, his head down, his snow-shoes rising and falling with dogged precision. Soon the whirling mass of white had hidden him from view. And then Nina Dubuc threw up her head and laughed.

Twenty minutes later she was throwing over herself a cloak of bear-skin and hurrying through the storm to Gaspard Durant's cabin.

GASPARD and Hicks had just started the interminable game of double solitaire with which they would while away the tedious hours of being storm-bound, no matter how long the storm might last. At the sight of Nina's face as she came through the door they sprang up as one man.

"Nina!" cried Gaspard. "What has happened?"

"Red George has gone!" cried the girl. "He has gone to Fort Gregory to file on your claims. He has the descriptions. He showed them to me. He knows your locations. I saw them. Oh, Gaspard, he is going to beat you out of your—out of our fortune."

Limpy Hicks stumbled swiftly to the door, six-shooter in hand. Then he closed the door and put the gun back, looking sheepish. Gaspard merely stood and stared.

"Our claims? Our descriptions?" he stammered. "But it can not be, Nina. No one knows."

"I know," said Nina. "You showed me last night."

At this Hicks swore.

"Red George knows also," she continued, "for I saw that the descriptions were the same as you showed me."

Gaspard and Hicks looked at each other.

"You blabbed, did you, you big calf," snarled Limpy. "I knew Red George wouldn't bring us any luck."

Gaspard was hurling himself into his mackinaw, reaching for cap and mittens, rifle and snow-shoes all at once. Hicks strode up to him, cursing, and he brushed the little man into a corner without looking. Near the door Nina leaned against the log wall, a hand to her breast, her eyes blazing.

"How long ago?" asked Hicks, turning on her. "How long ago?"

"No matter," laughed Gaspard bitterly. "I will catch him."

"Half an hour, perhaps," said Nina. "I could not come before—the storm."

"Then you'll never get him," cried Hicks in anguish. "He's the fastest musher in the country. He'll gain on you every foot of the way."

"Wait!" cried Nina. "Red George does not know this part of the country. He will go down to the foot of the valley fifteen miles; then swing east over the flat country."

"Sure," snapped Hicks. "That's the trail to Fort Gregory."

"And a man who knows the country—Gaspard, you know the pass over the Range. It is less than ten miles that way to the end of the valley. A man who could cross the mountains at the pass could be waiting for him at the foot of the valley. Am I right?"

"The pass in this weather is murder, that's all," said Limpy.

But Gaspard had caught Nina in his arms and was holding her in the air.

"Nina, my Nina! I thank you for that!" he laughed. "Limpy, my partner," he continued, putting her down, "I have been a fool, as you have often called me. Now we shall see if I am a man."

Hicks leaped forward and caught him around the middle.

"Don't you try that pass, Gaspard," he pleaded, holding him back. "All the copper in the world—I'd sooner lose my head——"

Gaspard hurled him roughly back into the room. His eyes were upon Nina.

"Nina," he said as he stepped out of the cabin, "you wish me to go?"

She nodded without moving. When he was gone from their sight she called after him—

"But I want you to come back, Gaspard. I want you to come back."

IV

RED GEORGE was making good time as he rounded the mountains at the foot of the valley and swung east over the barrens, on a straight line for Fort Gregory. As Limpy Hicks had said, the giant was the fastest "musher" in the country, and in spite of the White Wind which whined and tore at him he had

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covered the fifteen miles in shorter time than any other man in the region could have done. Not once had he paused to rest or reconnoiter.

He was always in perfect condition, and he knew that he was alone in the storm and had no one to fear. He went with his head down, shielding his eyes from the whirling crystals that sought to blind him.

He did not look ahead. There was no need. His almost animal instinct gave him the sense of direction, and he knew that no other man would be risking his life out in the terrible White Wind. Therefore he was mightily surprised when a heavy rifle roared out in the storm, from behind the last rock where the Caribou Range met the level ground, and a .44 slug tore through his hand that was carrying the rifle. The gun sank into the snow. An instant later a second slug whined past his right ear. Then a mocking voice said:

"Hands up, Red George! The next one goes through your big head."

Red George, being experienced, flung his hands high over his head. Out from behind the rock then came Gaspard Durant, his rifle trained on the giant's breast.

"A long walk for nothing, Red George," said Gaspard. "Keep your hands up. You have things on you which I want."

With the muzzle of his rifle in the other's back Gaspard first drew the big knife from Red George's belt, threw it away, then found the two slips of paper which Nina had given him. Gaspard looked closely at them. He recognized the handwriting, and started. For a moment he stood staring at the papers, then he stowed them carefully away in his pocket.

"Now you may bind up your hand," he said. "You are bleeding hard."

Gratefully Red George bound a tourniquet on his wrist and wrapped the mangled hand in his handkerchief. He did not speak a word. He had looked in Gaspard's eyes and knew words were useless.

"Good!" said Gaspard. "Now we will take a little walk, you and I, Red George. We will go over the mountains back to the settlement of Pierre Dubuc. Turn about. Forward, march!"

With the barrel of his rifle resting squarely behind Red George's heart, Gaspard drove his man up the foothills toward the cruel pass over which he had just traveled. The storm upon the heights was a demon incarnate.

Part of the time they crawled, part of the time they sought the shelter of rocks and gasped for the breath which the wind had sucked from their lungs. But always Gaspard was behind, his rifle touching Red George's back. At the top of the divide, with their goal almost in reach, the giant sagged in his tracks.

"Shoot," he said. "Have done. We can not make it."

Gaspard prodded cruelly with the barrel.

"Go on," he commanded. "Nina Dubuc wishes to see you."

"To see me?" George tottered on.

"Yes," said Gaspard bitterly, "and after she has seen you I fear I will be sorry that I did not shoot. Go on."

His words seemed to put new life into the man ahead of him. He stumbled forward so rapidly that Gaspard was hard put to it to keep pace.

"The woman you can have—if things are as I fear," said Gaspard. "But not the claim. For half of that belongs to my partner, Limpy Hicks. Go on now. My finger is heavy on the trigger."

IT WAS dark when they stumbled wearily into the big cabin of Pierre Dubuc. To Gaspard's surprise he saw that the big room was filled with people of the settlement. In a corner sat a stranger wrapped in blankets, and Limpy Hicks was giving him drink from a cup that steamed.

These things Gaspard was conscious of as he thrust his man before him through the door. Also he was conscious that people started at the sight of them, and that the man in the blankets tottered weakly to his feet. But Gaspard's eyes were only for Nina Dubuc who stood alone in the center of the room.

"I have brought him back for you, Nina," he said steadily. "I had him at my mercy; I would have shot him had I not discovered that you wanted him."

As a reply the girl laughed so that the rafters rang.

"That is right," said Gaspard bitterly. "I am learning about women. I have been a soft fool in not shooting this man, because of you, and now you laugh me to scorn."

"Gaspard, Gaspard!" laughed Nina. "What do you think you have discovered?"

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"This," said Gaspard, drawing the description papers from his pocket. "They are in your handwriting. Look at them."

"Oh, Gaspard!" Nina was laughing again. "Do you look at them—look carefully. I thought you would have seen at once."

Still keeping Red George covered, Gaspard looked at the papers. A look of amazement spread over his face.

"*Sacré nom de Dieu!*" he bellowed. "These are not the descriptions of our claims at all. They—they are nothing—they are not even like——"

Suddenly Gaspard's wearied brain became conscious that things were happening. Red George had muttered an oath. The stranger of the blankets was standing on his swaying legs, a six-shooter held in his hand. The blankets had slipped from his shoulders, and Gaspard saw the red coat and chevrons of a corporal of Mounted Police.

"Thought you were having me when you dumped me out of the canoe, didn't you, George?" said the man in a feeble voice. "Oh, no! After I took that shot at you in the water I made the bank and followed down on foot. Should have ironed you. Here."

He tore a pair of handcuffs from his belt and flung them on the floor.

"Put those on the waster, will you, people? He's mine. I was taking him down the river to the Fort and he tipped the canoe, far up above here. Had one shot at him and missed. Managed to make it here on foot. He's wanted for killing a partner. Thank you. Now I'll have a bit more brandy, if you please."

Having said which, and having seen his man properly ironed, the corporal promptly fainted away.

Gaspard scarcely noticed. He was looking at Nina. And she was looking at him with eyes that made the young man's heart beat more rapidly than ever.

"You gave him these papers——?"

"False papers, my Gaspard," she said. "He said he was a better man than you. He said he would go to Fort Gregory and file his claims if he were in your place. I—I sent him."

Gaspard stared uncomprehendingly.

"And—then you sent me after him," he stammered. "Why—why?"

He tottered, and she leaped forward and eased him onto a chair.

"Why?" she cried shaking him. "Why? Because he said he was a better man than my man—than the man I love—than the man I am going to marry!"

"Nina!" murmured Gaspard weakly.

"And now no man in the country will dare to say that," she continued. "And—and, Gaspard, we—we do not have to wait till you go to Fort Gregory now. My father has agreed."

Gaspard looked up at her for a long time.

"Who asked him?" he whispered.

And for answer she hid her face upon his shoulder.

Limpy Hicks, forcing a hot drink down the corporal's throat, nodded his head sagely as he heard what passed between the pair.

"That's women," he said forcibly. "That's women for you."

WINTER DREAMS

By Mary Carolyn Davies

THE streets are white with Winter, and the skies are old and gray,
The streets are chill with Winter, but I'm seeing, far away,
Green palms and gold acacias and a sky that's warm and low
And a hillside mad with poppies—although of course I know
There's nothing here but city-streets all heaped with choking snow.

The wind is cold with frost, but still I feel it warm and sweet
As it stirs the tangled yellow of the poppies at my feet,
And I see you panting, laughing, and pushing back your hair
On the wild hill-trail above me—though of course I am aware
That this is just a city-street with strangers everywhere.

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THE ADVENTURERS

A Four Part Story
PART THREE

••• By •••

Arthur A. Nelson

SYNOPSIS—A South African big-game hunter and gentleman adventurer, *Alan Severn*, receives from *Norma Raylescroft* a tiny diamond-studded miniature as a reward for saving her life in Johannesburg. From England comes *Miss Buckerton*, a Kentucky girl, to visit the *Raylescrofts*, and also *"Sherry" Severn*, *Alan's* cousin, who has fallen in love with her.

Alan rushes *Sherry* off on a lion hunt, during which *René Duval*, a friend, is killed. Upon their return a cablegram to France notifies *De Roquemont*, *René's* cousin, of the death.

Frequent visits to the *Raylescroft* home bring *Alan* suddenly to his senses. *Mr. Raylescroft*, the father, will have no penniless adventurer for a son-in-law. He prefers the polished *Lord Chalmes*. *Miss Raylescroft*, the daughter, tells *Alan* she will welcome him as a friend, but not as a lover. She, too, seems to favor *Chalmes*.

Alan determines to leave the Rand. The opportunity comes in the shape of the *Hon. Cecil Rhodes*, who buys the hitherto profitless Severn mine and then discloses to the two men his colossal dream of Empire. He proposes that they investigate, for him, a certain part of the little-known depths of Central Africa, coveted by Belgium; and that with them they take *Ingulf*, *Alan's* servant, a descendant of the Vikings, and also old *Dr. Ivarsson*, archeologist, seeker for the hidden city located by *Ibrahim's* map, and described by an ancient Norse saga.

Far up-country they join, for protection, a force led by *De Roquemont*, secret agent of Belgium, Britain's rival in Africa. Near the Zambezi they defeat a band of natives, rescuing a captive party made up of *Lord Chalmes*, *Norma Raylescroft*, *Miss Buckerton* and *Mrs. Rountree*, an American widow. *Alan* is forced by circumstance to take them along. Together they plunge northward toward the equator.

CHAPTER XIV

THE MOUNTAIN OF THE SKULL

SEMI-DARKNESS — darkness deep as twilight in northern latitudes—brooded over the great equatorial forest. Once fairly within its profound shades, it was literally impossible to see the sun. It was as if a tremendous pall had been let down from above.

There were depths where one saw only such light as a diver sees ten fathoms below the surface of the sea. And there was an insecurity, a sense of abominable profundity, that struck into man's cheerfulness like a poisoned knife, and laid the bond of its mysterious silence across men's lips.

Nobody attempted to talk at all, except when it was unavoidable. The seal of silence was inexorable in that place. It suited the taciturn humor of the Arabs well enough; they were little given to conversation anywhere. But we had to hack a way every few yards for the donkeys with the Maxims, and the crashing of our sabers on the dense tropic growth proved at least that we were men and not a procession of specters, for which the Arabs in their ghostly long white burnooses might have passed as they flitted through those silent, fever-haunted glades, wordless and grim in the

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dim light, with the fear of Allah written on their dark faces.

There were other more material horrors too. Before we had been a week in the forest two men had sickened and died of fever brought on by the nameless reek of things decayed and rotten, working in scarcely healed wounds. Four days afterward another man died suddenly of the wasting sickness caused by eating the semi-poisonous manioc root in its crude state. Poor wretch, he had only supplemented his all too meager rations in private; provisions were running perilously low.

There was no game to speak of in the forest and we had beheld no human dwellers for weeks. Its desolation was appalling! It was like a country that had never had an inhabitant. For all one knew, that vast, sunless waste might stretch to the fabled *Lunæ Montes*, or "Mountains of the Moon" of the ancients, or on to the distant highlands of Abyssinia, far away to the north.

On the twenty-ninth of June we had crossed the Equator, but found no break in the great forest. According to Dr. Ivarsson's aneroid, we were more than 6,000 feet above sea-level, and steadily ascending. Up to now we had been guided by Ibrahim's map, but in our extraordinary position no map or chart made by man was of much avail, since it was impossible to go around a barrier which stretched east and west right across the continent in a solid belt four hundred miles wide.

It is quite true that explorers have managed to pierce that gigantic natural barrier in a desultory fashion, but only once in a great while, at places hundreds of miles apart; and the empty look upon the maps of Central Africa still tells of enigmas unguessed—of riddles never read. Yet we must face it and penetrate its secret or turn back.

To make matters worse we were short of quinine. We went on indomitably, fighting off fever at every step, and no jarring twinge of conscience obtruded itself in my thoughts concerning the propriety of making common cause with the emissary of the other flag. By tacit consent we hung together; I had actually grown to have a liking for the man and to regret that he was my unconscious adversary in that left-handed game.

And I believed he was in the dark as to me.

THE days had passed in apparently endless marches; and the ladies, mounted on their sturdy, sure-footed donkeys that never seemed to tire, bore that journey pluckily, while Eric Ivarsson was their mainstay in foul weather. That grotesque old savant, strangely enough, was forever at their beck and call.

And day after day I had watched the waning bloom upon their cheeks fading insensibly but surely—had marked the slow, significant deepening of those haggard little circles, like the pallid shadows of sorrow that fall from some master painter's brush: the vague reflections of his darker moods, that haunt so many a priceless, pictured face.

Cursing fate impotently, I turned my eyes away from the sight of those wonderful, serene white faces—those haunting faces which the huge unreasoning maw of the ravening wilderness was perhaps inevitably to swallow and annihilate forever, after all. For I knew that starvation and fever grinned at them openly now, though they had never guessed.

For it had come to that. We had food for only four days more, and but two ounces of quinine. And then, like a thief in the night, came the sleeping-sickness—that pale specter of the tropics—and men began to die off suddenly like flies.

What was it? Only another grim riddle of the Dark Continent, we hear people say. Yet to think that brave men should sleep unwakened at the gates of death; to see the stamp of unutterable weariness so strangely graven on their hopeless faces—that is the pity of it—that incomprehensible torpor, that hideous surrender! And that was what we saw, hour by hour, till our brains reeled with horror, and more than a fifth of our number had gone to swell the long list of victims of that equatorial hell.

Man after man they dropped in that deathly sleep, and we were powerless to save them. But we went on somehow. Over us the long, quiet shadows of twilight drooped continually, and it seemed as if we should never emerge again to the welcome light of day, into the perfect sunshine that men never learn to value at its true worth, it seems, until it has been cut off.

In the most desperate situations there is always hope. That is a lesson which man has never quite unlearned. About four

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o'clock—it was the fourth day and our food was nearly gone—Lord Chalmes, who chanced to be ahead, stumbled into a patch of ripening plantains. There were faint traces of a clearing which the rank, choking growth of the tropics had nearly obliterated. There were no bones and no remains of huts. Whoever the people were that had once cultivated the clearing, they had long since gone away. But the plantains had gone on multiplying in accord with Nature's bountiful law, until now there were literally thousands of them nearly ripe.

And, as if by an actual miracle, we were saved! The discovery had put new hope into our hearts, for we knew we could not be far off the edge of the forest now. It was obvious enough that no natives would go very far in for a purpose so simple. The wholesome food had magically banished the epidemic of sickness that had stricken the men, and after a few hours' rest we went on with renewed strength.

ON THE sixth day, at nine o'clock, one of the Arabs in front called out that he could see a great light ahead of him. A cheer went up from all those bronzed throats, and then, pell-mell, men falling over one another in their eagerness, we rushed forward and found that we had reached the end of the great barrier.

There, in a sky without a cloud, the sun was shining placidly on a scene that made our hearts beat faster as we gazed. Wave on wave of rolling uplands covered with long yellow *tambouki* grass, like a sea of ripening grain, and in the distance the broad expanse of a beautiful blue lake, like a magnificent gem in a setting of green, rocky hills. Far away to the north, fifty miles or more, the morning sun-rays kissed the tall, glittering white crests of a mighty mountain range, whose snow-capped peaks towered into the blue.

A voice said suddenly behind me:

"Across those mountains, my friend, we shall find each what our hearts desire! For me the other half of the Saga; for you—what? Hardly the land of milk and honey you expect to find—you and my good friend Rhodes; but a land of old secrets, of ruins, of dead gods. Aye, the sea-kings are there, I tell you; there is the aerie they would seek, and the Norse records do not tell lies."

I turned around to the old archeologist who was standing there with the rapt look of some Norse *skald* on his cracked and wrinkled face, his long iron-gray locks flying in the breeze.

"You are mad," I said. "Quite mad! There are no Vikings there. You've come to the wrong show. The old fellow had a bad nightmare, you know. The whole business is a chimera."

For answer he pointed significantly at Ingulf, who stood gazing fixedly at the far-off mountains, his lips half parted, and a queer stare on his inscrutable face.

"Look at that man," he droned. "Tell me if you can who is he; where did he come from? Look at his eyes! A man might hazard a guess that it is not the first time he has seen those mountains. I tell you he knows something if he would speak out."

Lord Chalmes sauntered up to us, lazily wiping his monocle.

"Ripping set of scenery," he observed. "Gad, sir, it is like heaven after purgatory. Miss Buckerton has just issued another ultimatum. We've concluded, you know, to see this thing through with you chaps, and I dare say I'm not sorry. I fancy I may have turned a bit crusty once or twice," he was good enough to add. He nodded to Dr. Ivarsson with an amused grin. "So you think you shall find your lost sea-kings behind those mountains, doctor?"

The other wagged his great head vigorously.

"Aye," he said, "we shall find them, young sir, so surely as the first white man to set his foot on the North American continent was a Norseman!"

I left the Doctor gesticulating like a hypnotist in his lordship's amused, incredulous face, and went to have a look at the donkeys. None of them had come to any harm in the forest, except from the aloe thorns, and in half an hour we were on the march again, steering for the snow-capped mountain range.

In that marvelously clear atmosphere, it seemed no more than a day's march away; but it was three days before we had reached the base of the mountains and started to ascend them, picking our route through a terrifically narrow mountain-pass which appeared to wind its tortuous way slowly upward to the snow-line.

At times we had to dismount and lead our beasts, where the pass dwindled to a

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mere foot-path running along the verge of an awful chasm which had in places a sheer drop of fifteen hundred feet. And often there was barely room for one of the donkeys with the Maxims to squeeze by. Once I thought they would go over the brink with the guns. But they never did.

It was the most terrifying abyss that any of us had ever seen—like the pit of hell itself in some dream of the painter Doré. And, looking down those frightful, perpendicular walls, I felt my brain positively reel. They conveyed subtly a horrible invitation: had an extraordinary drawing-power, like shadowy hands down there that beckoned, beckoned. . . . And below us, over those black depths, a solitary bird of prey hung motionless, poised on powerful wings.

AT FIVE o'clock we reached the snow-line, having begun the ascent of the pass at dawn. That night the Arabs suffered keenly from the cold, and the water froze to ice in our canteens. The ladies passed the long hours at least endurably in their tent, in which an oil stove was kept burning; while De Roquemort—a wise, quiet, capable, clever De Roquemort in this sort of emergency—had draped the outside with skins that broke the chill of the wind.

To any party less well equipped, a night passed at that altitude would have meant being frozen stiff. But we had had the foresight to halt at a small clump of dwarfed firs which grew, as if by a providential whim of fate, out of the ragged flank of the mountain, and a roaring fire was kept going. They were the very last sentinels of vegetable life. Everywhere else, above us, and in front, the mountain was naked save for the lava ashes and the snow. We were bivouacking on a chain of extinct volcanoes.

The Arabs, huddled together by the fire for warmth, snatched a few hours of broken sleep. At length we joined them, throwing ourselves down on the hard ground, close to the animals; for men will sleep even in the strangest and most disquieting surroundings.

Somehow at last the night wore away; another dawn came gliding over the crest of the lofty range, and presently the snow-clad peaks above us were glowing as if lit up by the glare of a burning city. Like a rampart reared by supernatural hands to hide a formidable secret from the prying gaze of that puny insect, man, the great range ran on unbroken into the northeast, apparently in a mighty circle, farther than the eye could reach. It frowned in silent grandeur over the rest of the landscape for league on league, and was capped with the eternal snows.

We began at once to descend the pass. After some hours of very rough going over jagged, crumbling lava-beds, it swung out around the eastern flank of the mountain, which had totally cut off the view to the north. Then it wound down the mountainside in a series of sharp zigzags, like the trail of a colossal snake upon a hillside.

We halted to look, and I saw Dr. Ivarsson abruptly unsling a battered pair of binoculars. I rubbed my eyes. There was something queer with the landscape; it was all out of joint. The Arabs, jabbering away like anything, pointed out to the desert. Cold fear was written on their faces. But Eric Ivarsson, who had hastily unslung his binoculars, never raised them to his eyes.

Lord Chalmes at my elbow kept saying in a curious, rapid, tense mutter:

"Well I'm demmed! . . . Well I'm demmed! . . . "

I stared and stared.

DOWN there in the middle of the arid desert, which stretched away to the north for fifty or sixty miles from the foot of the mountains, was set a great mass of fantastic architecture—the glittering spires and towers of a large walled city, rising white and tall out of a blazing veil of yellow vapor. And then, before you could wink twice, that ghostly city had faded and disappeared. Where it had been, there was only the wild expanse of sun-bleached desert.

Dr. Ivarsson let out a startling, hollow cackle.

"You saw it too, then?" he mumbled.

"Aye—the mirage, you mean?"

"The city of lost men, or its atmospheric projection; its aura—whatever you like! So, young friend, that place exists, and perhaps we may see it one day. Mark me, the mirage does not send its illusion across mountains."

He cackled triumphantly, and then suddenly froze up with a gasp. His eyes

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were riveted on Ingulf, who stood shaking like a leaf in the wind, his fingers convulsively closed on the hilt of the dead swashbuckler's formidable weapon which he had half drawn—staring, staring at the empty desert, but with such a look of cold fury and hatred and fear on his distorted features as I had never seen stamped on any man's face.

It gave me the cold shivers. That ghostly illusion, that unreal city of the lost, had stirred him to unsuspected depths. Had the past come back? Had he seen something exactly like that before?

Nobody but the doctor had noticed the remarkable effect which the mirage had produced on Ingulf. We descended to the plain and struck out across the desert, having filled our water-skins at a running stream that flowed from the eastern side of the mountains. A great spur ran out to the east from the parent range in the shape of a gigantic scythe, ending in three tall peaks.

By the end of the second day we were close enough to make out that the tallest peak was apparently a volcano in much the same stage of suspended activity as Vesuvius has been for centuries. At times we could see with the aid of the doctor's binoculars a very faint, very tall column of blue smoke above the summit; but there were times when it was not discernible.

But by noon of the next day the country began to grow more fertile; we had reached the end of the desert. And it was time—barely a pint of water remained apiece. One of the Arabs had actually contrived on the first day to stalk an ostrich, lying flat on his stomach and wriggling like a human snake half a mile through the sand, with the marvelous patience of the indomitable children of the East. Afterward, arrayed in the dead bird's skin, he had bagged three more, walking up boldly within gunshot. And, in a hollow scooped in the sand, we had found a dozen giant eggs, perfectly fresh. They had helped to solve the problem of food.

So we had not suffered any heroic privations; and the eternal heritage of hope, so strong in every human breast, welled up buoyantly again as we made out not more than five or six miles off the broad silver ribbon of a river winding away from the great mountain-spur.

The ladies uttered delighted exclamations.

"A river!" Alline cried in rapture. "A real river! Dear me, what a luxury it would be to bathe!"

"Rather a risky luxury," Chalmes said dryly. "The crocodiles, you know——"

He paused apologetically.

De Roquemort, smiling across at Mrs. Rountree with the detached air of a very perfect understanding, politely put at their disposal the newest *cri* in portable canvas baths, of which, in addition to his other amazing effects, he had brought two from France. The man was a long succession of surprises. He was always admirable. He fought a battle for you or did you an inestimable service with the same gay air of *noblesse oblige*. His offer of a portable bathtub to a lady who was marooned by the vagaries of fate on the great plateau of East Central Africa never staggered me. Had she expressed a desire to fly, I never doubted he would have conjured up an air-ship. I was beginning to know him very well.

"Bathtubs, Mademoiselle," he added with a touch of raillery, "are like wine-bottles—too often empty! Permit me to make my little epigram. *Enfin*—never bathe till you come to the water!"

"Oh, the river's warranted real," I said.

"By Ibrahim," he said significantly. "It is marked here on the poor devil's map."

BY SUNSET we were camped on the river's grassy shore which was like Arcadia, after the desert. Wild fowl called in the reeds, and all around was the teeming life of wild things. Only man was missing from the scheme.

We lolled, smoking, on the velvet sward. The sinking sun threw an enormous crimson glare on the scarred face of the mountain opposite—now not more than four or five miles off—lighting it up in red relief against the sky. And suddenly we became aware of something diabolic about that mountain.

Every one stared. Good God! there was a great face glaring at us—a dim, colossal, devilish face! It was like a countenance dead and desecrated, of which the principal characteristic was very obviously evil.

Evil, but not the evil that men associate

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with peril; rather was it the evil of an ancient threat, of an immortal menace, of a monstrous calamity hung up there ten thousand feet in mid-air.

As I looked it sent a cold shiver straight through me. De Roquemort sprang to his feet from the sward where he had been lolling, and pointed at the mountain, with a biting Gascon oath like the rasp of a file on steel.

"Death of my blood!" he said, "it is the 'Mountain of the Skull!' Ibrahim told the truth, after all!"

CHAPTER XV

THROUGH THE CRATER'S WALL

I WAS quite speechless, and rather sharply shaken. Ibrahim *had* told the truth; it *was* the "Mountain of the Skull!" At least by some colossal freak of Nature the configuration of its western face had an astonishingly realistic resemblance to a monstrous skull, when seen from a matter of five miles or so; you lost the *vraisemblance* any closer. The thing utterly staggered the imagination, until you came to understand that it was, of course, merely a fantastic freak of resistless volcanic forces working on a huge scale.

Two thirds of the way to the summit there were two immense holes in the crater's wall, roughly circular and nearly a thousand feet apart—a Titan might have drilled them with the pyramid of Cheops for a tool, and the Eiffel Tower could have been thrown bodily into either one of them. Quite a thousand feet below them yawned a frightful triangular chasm which seemed to pierce the very entrails of the mountain, and perfectly suggested the nasal cavity of a skull.

Below that there was a great cleft hundreds of feet broad, but not very deep, filled up by the flow of molten lava from beneath. Molten lava had drilled the enormous eye-holes and blown out the cavity of the nose; and molten lava had added a final touch of realism by guttering, as it dried, in rows of giant, blackish-yellow teeth, across that huge and shallow *crevasse,* the edges of which writhed back dreadfully in a dim, satanic grin.

The crater itself seemed cut off short at the top. It was flat-rimmed like a vast punch-bowl, and the sides being capped with snow had exactly the appearance of a huge hairless pate. And in point of fact, the whole conception could not have been more abominably realistic had it been hewn, at the nod of some great king, to a chorus of groans, the echo of an old-world lash, or chain-ganged, red-handed, by all the sculptors of a thousand years!

Even the Arabs, quite unnerved, those wild retainers who feared nothing alive, gazed speechlessly at that uncanny sight till suddenly from among them rose a voice of panic:

"Look, look at the mountain! *Shaitan!* . . . . 'Tis the Evil One. . . . Fly! Fly!"

They would have bolted outright, but they were fatalists. Kismet! Allah was great, and what was written was written, in spite of any human line of action. The owner of the panic-stricken voice did bolt for a hundred yards or more back toward the desert, where he fell down in a dead swoon and had to be revived afterward with rum. But he was a cross-bred Swahili, the son of an epileptic mother. The others stood their ground, mumbling shaken prayers.

DR. IVARSSON, quite unstaggered, was staring at the phenomenon through battered binoculars.

"Ha, young friend! Who is right now?" he burst out with his racking, hollow cackle.

I had to confess that his Sagas were unpleasantly veracious. Then suddenly the blood-red glare died out on the face of the mountain, and the sun went down with the weird abruptness of the tropics, as though its setting had been an act of astounding legerdemain.

The devilish skull-face had disappeared!

At moonrise it reappeared, terrifically realistic in the pallid moonlight. It stood out horribly clear. The effect was perfectly ghastly! It was like a literal personification of the scriptural Golgotha.

De Roquemort, coming up alertly, broached the news of a forced march till moonset to steady the jolted *morale* of his superstitious crew. He laughed; it was the Corsican's trick with the *Grande Armée.* So we trekked into the night, our course dead set for the mountain, never stopping till the moon had swung to the zenith and vanished behind a long black bank of driving wrack coming up from the east;

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immense and vague, like the familiar smoke-pall of a big metropolis. Some of it *was* smoke, I could have sworn—volcanic "sift."

At twelve o'clock we were beginning to ascend the swelling slopes of the mountains.

The stars died out in the sky one by one while we traveled on over the crumbling lava-clinker toward the tallest of the three peaks. The huge satanic face, or semblance of a face, had faded out of view altogether as we approached nearer to the crater; but the overhanging smoke wrack had grown gigantic, suggesting at its heart a nebulous, dull-red glow, and at intervals a drifting rain of calcined ashes came down to us in a fine white powder on fitful gusts of wind—like the breath of mystery stirring the hoary dust of the past.

But the breaking light in the east was already heralding another day; and after a halt of several hours to rest, we went on again at nine o'clock. The Arabs, reassured in the depths of their brave, wild hearts by the very complete *insouciance* of the little *Giaour's* expressive military back, swaggered on with something of their old cheerfulness on the march; while the *Giaour* himself rode rapturously at Mrs. Rountree's side, their heads bobbing intimately together in a way suggestive of a set finale.

When we halted at midday I had found him sprawling, hypnotized, at her feet. The polite French soldier of fortune and the handsome Yankee widow of the cast, detrained together by the *scenario* of the plot, could not at all be expected to remain at odds.

At another time I should have been secretly amused. But at the moment, a bizarre thing occurred. A sound so strange, so unexpected in that part of the world as to be even ominous and startling, awoke the echoes so weirdly that it brought us all to our feet. It was the deep-mouthed baying of a hound, which floated up eerily on the wind.

It seemed to rise from a ravine nearly two hundred yards beneath us. I glanced around to convince myself that it was not the Marquis' dog, Chasseur, who had strayed on a roving chase; but he lay quietly crunching a bone at his master's feet. It was another dog, a dog with a wild, strangely menacing note; and at the first sound of it the big Pyrrenean wolfhound sprung erect with every hair bristling.

We leaped up very much shaken, and queerly enough, for it was only a dog baying, every hand instinctively went out to a weapon.

Louder and louder that weird, deep-throated music floated up to us. Suddenly, very distinct and clear, there came an unmistakable blast of a huntsman's horn. And almost immediately the black mouth of the ravine appeared to throw out several swiftly moving objects, the first of which came on like a bird on the wing, with wonderful bounds and leaps and a play of tossing antlers that, like its splendid, lithe body, were all coal black.

IT WAS a beautiful sable stag, but unlike any known species which I had ever beheld. It came on at terrific speed. Behind it, running long and low, came a huge dog nearly as big as a lion, and lastly a gigantic man, carrying a long bow, who ran almost as fast as the dog.

The stag came on straight at us. At fifty yards I saw the man pull up short and draw a long arrow to the head. I heard a twang as loud as a harp-string's.

I saw the black stag suddenly spring almost a dozen feet in the air, on the run, and fall back with a sound like an audible sigh. It was not ten paces away. We gathered in a silent circle around him and watched that splendid, hunted creature die. His great, liquid, almost human eyes looked up at us, full of despair; and then with a single mortal tremor, he expired with what looked very much like an old English cloth-yard shaft buried to the feather in his vitals.

But I had no time to think of that. My gaze was abruptly riveted upon the remarkable brute that had coursed the stag. It ran up with terrible swiftness to the carcass on which, paying no attention to us, it planted its huge forepaws and gave voice to a prolonged burst of baying which had about it a strange suggestion of a roar.

It was a great dog, indeed, but such a dog as no one among us had ever seen. It appeared to be a hybrid, crossed between a hyena and a Great Dane. It had the mastiff's short, broad ears and square jaws, with its rangy build, and, wonder of wonders, a hyena's mane! And it seemed almost twice the size of any dog known to the civilized world, and was in color a remarkable dark yellow, shot with black.

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Its eyes were perfectly green. They had the opaque transparence of a cat's.

The Marquis mechanically stepped closer, his hand on his pistol, though he had no idea of molesting the queer beast. Not so with the great hound Chasseur. Like his master, he was a gentleman born, and carried about him a gentleman's loathing for the *canaille.*

Advancing slowly, with bristling hair, the big wolfhound, who was himself a dog of notable size and ferocity when aroused, leaped abruptly without a sound, straight at the hybrid's throat. What followed was startling. The hybrid's extraordinary eyes seemed to shoot flame. With catlike swiftness he shook off his foe, and suddenly seized him at the base of his neck and gave one quick, terrible crunch, his great jaws snapping shut like the teeth of a steel trap.

That was the passing of Chasseur. The wolfhound died in those steel jaws. The other dog relaxed his deadly grip then and contemptuously flung him away.

The Marquis watched his passing with a bitter face. He was shaken out of his *sang froid* for once. Tears sprang to his eyes; he said surprisingly at last:

"*Requiescat.* . . . He would have pined away in France. *Peste,* I do not blame the dog. He had to defend himself. Name of a devil, what a brute! *Ma foi!* and the master——"

He froze up abruptly. There was the crunch of footsteps upon the clinker, and then a dead, astonished silence.

A FIGURE in barbaric leopard-skins that caught the sunlight stalked through the circle and confronted us in a silence that nobody seemed able to break—as if he had held us all in a spell. It was that of a colossal mulatto with a rather terrifying cast of features. He had a yellow-gray skin, long, straight, coal-black hair and steel-gray eyes—it flashed into my mind that they were like Ingulf's eyes, though the man's skin was darker. He was armed with a great bow, and a dagger with a cross-hilt hung to a steel chain, and carried a huntsman's horn.

We stared at him amazed, and a little awed. He was plainly not afraid of us at all. That struck me as a bit peculiar. Was there a reason? Was he aware that others like himself—a race of giants—were in easy call of a single blast on that long horn by his side? The idea was alarmingly uncomfortable. Even our firearms failed to impress him when Torres, the Portuguese, to try him, suddenly presented a pistol in his face, but he never blenched or cringed. But at the ladies he cast so significant a stare that they were obliged to turn their backs, blushing furiously.

"Begad, gentlemen," said Lord Chalmes with a laugh, "the beggar couldn't tell a pistol from a pipe-case—but he knows a pretty face when he sees one!"

The Marquis addressed the colossus variously in all the Bantu dialects he knew. Then he tried Swahili and Arabic. There was no reply. At each attempt he shook his head, pointing to the mountains.

"Wait a bit," said Sherry. "I've a man who can spout his particular lingo!" And he dragged Ingulf forward.

At sight of him the other started and said something in a barbaric tongue. I was amazed to hear Ingulf reply, though haltingly, with the dazed air of a man to whom the memory of familiar things slowly comes back.

Dr. Ivarsson listened with his head cocked off to one side, and I saw a shadow of disappointment pass over his face. I heard him mutter—"It is not the same." He clawed at my arm, and said aloud:

"Six or seven centuries of miscegenation have corrupted the tongue. Only the lingual type, the structural form, remains."

But I had turned away, bewildered, to Ingulf.

"Speak, man!" I demanded. "Who is he?" and Ingulf, who seemed dazed, replied mechanically—

"A huntsman of the white king—of the king who dwells in the city on top of the mountains."

"On top of the mountains!" I echoed. "He is mad."

But Dr. Eric Ivarsson, with a light breaking over his wrinkled face, stared at me with a triumphant smile.

"Aye," he said—he was hopping about with excitement—"and where else should it be but on top of the mountains, probably in an extinct crater. That is why no explorers have ever found it—it is the City of the Lost! But we shall find it, and the Saga shall come true. They always do, my good friend!"

The doctor fell a-cackling.

"So!" he mumbled, "run this fellow to

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earth in his own kennel and we shall see! Bid him lead us to the king's place!"

Ingulf complied, pointing to the cliffs.

The other frowned and shook his head, then by way of answer significantly tapped the cross-hilt of his dagger, with a sardonic flash of eyes and show of alarming teeth. So unmistakable was this bit of byplay, which was as good as a pantomime, that it brought a dark flush to our Homeric henchman's face. With one bound he was at the man's shoulder; while Mrs. Rountree screamed.

The pair stood glowering like wolves about to spring at each other's throats. Then suddenly Ingulf's grim face was thrust forward till it was almost within an inch of the fellow's chin, and a flame like death seemed to leap from his eyes as he repeated his words in a guttural growl. Slowly the other's dark face blanched till at last, with a cringing gesture of one who has met his master, he bowed low, stretching out one arm before him, in a strange, half Eastern salaam; then pointed up to the towering wall of cliffs which formed the crater's mighty lip.

THEY lay upon the sky-line, clothed in their overpowering silence, like the walls of Valhalla itself. Some frightful earth-convulsion of ages gone had set them where they stood like a grim gray line of giant battlements guarding their monstrous secret from the world outside. Beyond them was what? Land of lost Vikings—that unreal city of the desert mirage—or only some savage *kraal* peopled by a fallen race, such as Africa is full of; the nameless fungi that cling to the dead roots of the past; the pitiful, scattered dust of the potter's clay swept up from the vanished marble floors and kingly halls that had flourished in a civilization which had sent even the brave Roman eagles reeling back, in an age when Carthage was mistress of the seas? What was the secret of the crater? Could we cross those frowning ramparts of mystery? And if we could, would any of us live to return?

The cowed colossus threw the carcass of the stag upon his back and set off with great strides over the clinker, beckoning us to follow. His huge dog trotted bristling at his master's heels, while we took up our march in their wake. The donkeys with the Maxims followed stoically through a storm of curses from the Swahilis; they were used to the rough going. But the ladies were presently obliged to dismount and walk as we crawled slowly up the mountainside, making for the cliff-wall.

The last quarter of a mile took us nearly an hour to climb, and it was eleven o'clock when we had finally reached the foot of the cliffs and gazed up with mingled emotions at their tremendous and nearly perpendicular walls of black basalt which cast an enormous shadow at the base, producing a weird illusion of dusk in the broad daylight. They soared straight up to the snow-line and ended in one wild rank of naked crags whose upper bastions were half hidden from sight by a white veil of trembling mist.

De Roquemort stared with a glum face from those naked walls of rock to his machine-guns, and back to the heights above, and his jaw fell. He could read no answer to that riddle.

"*Morbleu!*" cried he. "What a place! As well ask a gnat to lift an ox as try to scale those heights unless one could walk up them like a fly!"

But our strange guide had disappeared around a turn of the cliffs with Ingulf barely half a pace behind him. We followed, and saw him beckon us to advance. The cliff-wall for fifty feet or more made a sharp turn, then flattened like the side of a tall building, and we stood at length before a yawning black hole in the rock, with a dim resemblance to a colossal arched doorway big enough to allow a dozen horsemen to ride in abreast. It looked like the very gates of hell!

Some sense of awe and fear came over us all as we stared into its grim depths; and Norma, at my elbow, could not repress an exclamation of dismay.

"Good Heavens!" she faltered. "*Must* we go in there, Mr. Severn?"

I tried to reassure her with a laugh, but it stuck in my throat.

"Unfortunately," I said, "we must." And turning to the imperturbable Marquis, I added: "There is the solution of your riddle—you could take a battery of big guns through it if you had them. That hole probably goes right through the crater's wall."

He looked at me as if I had read his mind.

"The end of the trek!" quoth he.

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"And a dashed good job, begad!" Lord Chalmes broke in, peering, astounded, into the black mouth of the tunnel. "Damme, ye know, this beats the London tubes! You rotters may stay here until you petrify, but I am going in to meet the Gorgon!"

As languidly as he would have sauntered into one of his Piccadilly drawing-rooms, he stepped into the dark gates of the unknown!

Then we all advanced into the cave.

The Arabs, at a sign, closed up around the women, unslinging their rifles as they went. The donkeys had to be literally dragged by main force into the tunnel, trembling in animal terror at every step. The narrow shaft of light from without pierced the arched vault for barely a hundred and fifty feet, then the shadows lengthened till I could scarcely make out the dim form of our guide moving ahead of us, with Ingulf gliding like a ghost behind him.

In the gloom I saw the man's shadowy figure stoop over and heave at something at his feet. It came up abruptly and rolled over with a clatter on the stone floor, while our guide staggered back, shielding his eyes involuntarily from the column of dazzling flame which instantly leaped straight up to the roof from the hole in the floor, illuminating the cave for hundreds of yards with a glow like fifty electric arcs.

It was nothing but a great burning jet of natural gas released from some underground well, and lighted by the simple expedient of removing the slab of rock, which I now perceived was round, like the iron lids that fit the manholes in the pavements, and had a stone ring sunk in the top. To put out the flame, it was merely necessary to replace the lid, when the column of gas sunk back into its subterranean reservoir.

There was nothing supernatural about it. The thing was simplicity itself. Nature had furnished the stone pipes—man had merely turned on the gas. After the first shock of surprise we went on quite calmly in the friendly glow of that tall shaft of flame, which lit up the tunnel as brightly as the interior of some great railway terminal. It showed nothing but bare, slanting walls of black basalt, in places fully sixty feet high, and moist with the dripping of water from some unexplained source. There was not a trace of a sculptured figure nor a line of inscription anywhere.

ON WE went till the shadows deepened and the pillar of fire grew dim behind us. The winding passage made another turn and we stood in the darkness until our grim conductor heaved upon another stone ring in the rock, with the same result as before; out leaped the burning gas to the roof. There were three of these vent holes through which the gas rushed out, each of which was ingeniously fitted with a stone lid fastened by iron chains. They were never left burning by the people who used the passage, the practice being to extinguish them at each relay or station of the way.

Our guide, with Ingulf still following like a shadow at his heels, had already gone back to put out Number One, and we waited, huddled in a weird-looking crew beyond the burning pillar, and making perhaps the strangest company its glare had ever lighted.

"Isn't it madly gorgeous!" Miss Buckerton murmured. The colossus came gliding back. "Oh, for a paint palette and a rainbow brush! It is romance. . . . Sindbad the sailor; Prester John; Aladdin and the wonderful lamp! What a scene for a Jules Verne to describe!"

"It is uncomfortable romance!" said Norma, "like Bluebeard's castle. Don't stand and rhapsodize, Allinc! Aren't we near the exit yet, Mr. Severn?"

"Apply to the guard," I replied with mock gravity. "It's my first trip, you know."

She laughed and we advanced down the dim vault.

Presently I could feel an unmistakable down-grade, and the sheer, dark walls of basalt rapidly converged until they stood not more than the height of a man above the rocky floor and barely four feet apart. The weird glow of the fiery pillar faded and went out, as the passage took a couple of unexpected turns like a labyrinth in the Roman catacombs.

It was horribly dark. It was as if the gloom of night had suddenly fallen across the day. In ten seconds we had lost all sense of direction. Fortunately we had a few wax matches left, which Lord Chalmes had brought in a pocket of his shooting-coat from London, and one of the Arabs

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possessed a bronze lamp of native make, full of palm oil. After a violent squabble, the donkey drivers had pounced upon it; I could hear them cursing in chorus behind us in the darkness.

CHAPTER XVI

"VALKYRIA!"

WE GROPED our way in the shadows around an unexpected turn of the wall, into a dazzling flood of light that burst upon us like a physical shock. A weird lue-white pillar of brilliant fire glowed bke a thousand stars in the center of a lireat vaulted cave, as large as the nave of a cathedral.

Looking about us I saw that we were standing near a yawning hole in the floor, fifty feet across, and apparently bottomless, for the light fell aslant the pit and ended in a black line of mystery more than a hundred feet below. A broad stone coping ran all around the pit, obviously intended for the safety of pedestrians. But it was not the physical features of the place, though they were extraordinary enough, that held us all rooted to the spot.

"Look!" Lord Chalmes burst out, amazed. "The gas is aglow! . . . Curse it, we've got company in hades!"

At the farther side of the pit, a group of gigantic men stood watching us in silence. There were about a dozen in all. They were nearly all of colossal stature, but their rather repulsive features were stamped with an unmistakable negroid strain. They had the same yellow hue and straight black hair as our guide; but unlike the latter, they wore long black cloaks of some coarse linen cloth, with a sort of monkish cowl, and were unarmed, so far as we could see.

The next thing I saw was a dark-looking object that stood on a platform close to the edge of the pit, which, on closer scrutiny, proved to be a primitive windlass. It had a great reel of fiber cable ending in a rather gruesome iron hook.

The presence of such an anachronism in that place somehow quite staggered me. It was like a stage property that didn't fit the play. The men on the platform had obviously lowered something into that appalling hole. What it was it could only conjecture, but the whole procedure struck me as being uncanny. Our guide had already joined the group of men on the platform. We saw him point at us significantly, while the men across the pit stood watching us.

"Speak! Who are those men?" I demanded of Ingulf.

He muttered vaguely, half to himself.

"The descendants of the Ethiopians—the accursed priests of the Skull!"

Then before I could utter a word, a blood-curdling scream came from the depths of the pit. It was echoed by a hoarse cry in a frightful pitch of bass—a deep, nerve-shaking note that froze us all rigid.

"*Jesu!*" the Portuguese gasped out, gray with fear. "Let us get out of this horrible place."

He was brave, too, in his way, was this swarthy Señor Torres. I had seen him cool as an icicle in action, facing death without blenching. The place had got upon his nerves. As for me, I was in a cold sweat.

A wolfish smile flitted across the faces of the men at the pit's edge, and then they did a rather horrible thing. That whole mysterious, black-cloaked crew groveled on the stones together in a posture of abominable supplication, stretching out their arms weirdly until their heads bobbed on the ground, and droned out what seemed to be a prayer to the Thing in the pit. That dreadful chant, that shocking travesty of a creed, somehow turned me sick, and for a moment I turned my face away. Perhaps it was done to awe us; at any rate, theirs was an evil religion.

When I looked again, the priests had finished their muttered chant. I watched their dim, tall figures rise and glide across the cave, like a row of ghosts, and vanish through an opening in the wall. Then, seeing our guide beckon to us unmistakably, we followed and presently discovered from the draft of fresh air blowing inward on our faces that we were coming out into the enormous cup of the crater.

Ahead of us, a pale glimmer of daylight appeared in the passage and the air freshened as we advanced. Presently the entrance widened and we were out in the blinding sunlight.

The Arabs emerged praising Allah into their beards, and staring to right and left, but suddenly fell into a wordless silence. Even De Roquemort, abruptly shaken from his iron calm, pulled up as if petrified,

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while his lordship so far forgot himself as to swear audibly. But Dr. Eric Ivarsson, his warped features ablaze with triumph, pointed to the east.

"Look!" he cackled. "Do you believe the Sagas now?"

ALONG the eastern wall of cliffs, not more than four or five miles from us, a dim mass of colossal masonry rose upon the scarred flanks of the mountainside. It was a city, but a city such as none of us ever saw!

Row after row of wide paved courts and dwellings and temple fanes, with many a barbaric Eastern spire and dome—all built apparently of massive blocks of limestone—frowned almost level with our eyes, and a grim, tall citadel loomed dimly in the center, like a hoary survival of some feudal age! Over it all was the weird, mad beauty of the East! Like some very fortress of the gods, that white city gleamed out against the gray silence of the cliffs, rising tier above tier, under the intense blue sky, with its lush green terraces all asleep in the blazing tropic sun, while the heavy scent from its flower-starred gardens drifted back to us on the passing breeze. I stared spellbound, as if I had seen the fabled hanging gardens of Babylon itself come back to earth!

A cry broke from Ingulf's lips.

"Valkyria! Valkyria!"

It was the city of the mirage, days ago.

"Ibrahim raved of the quarries," said the voice of De Roquemort. "He raved of the overseer's lash, and the pitiless sun. They broke his heart with toil, those devils. Look, there are the ancient limestone quarries on the cliffside."

Señor Torres' swarthy face suddenly turned gray.

"We go into the lion's jaws!" he said with a shudder. "Señor Marquis, what if that fate of Ibrahim be ours? *Jesu!* And the women?"

"Bah! *camarade*, your nerves are unstrung. Have you forgotten how you swept the Giant's Table, back yonder in Matabeleland? Harkee! If it comes to that, we can teach these *canaille* that we are their masters! Ha! El Zanek, what say you, old jackal of the desert?"

"*Kismet! Kismet!*" the Arab replied monotonously; but a gleam of avarice blazed up in his yellow face. "*Effendi*, there is much to gain yonder, if it comes to blows. Perchance there may be *houris* of Paradise for some. As Allah liveth, it is too late to turn back now. Let us enter the city, and chance it."

"Aye, old buzzard," quoth Lord Chalmes, "well said. It is too late to cut and run. Look yonder," he added, pointing to where a road wound down the cliffs, "there is the road to the city, and our friends of the cloth are waiting. It will never do to let them think we are afraid. We must go on."

A furlong ahead of us, the priests had already turned into the road. We followed them, with the Maxims significantly brought up in the van. The ladies, mounted once more upon their sure-footed riding-donkeys, rode merrily behind the guns, dropping a running volley of exclamations at the wonderful panorama that lay spread out before us.

The road ran straight along the cliff-wall to the city, where it turned off in a great sweeping curve to the eastward, over a green, rolling plain where herds of long-horned cattle and other animals, which Dr. Ivarsson's binoculars showed unmistakably to be horses, grazed placidly in the mellow afternoon haze. The fertile valley below us could not have been less than forty or fifty miles across from crest to crest, and was shaped like some enormous punch-bowl that lay in the Titanic lap of the crater.

In the middle of the punch-bowl lay a magnificent sheet of blue water, many miles in extent, fed by the mountain streams that gushed from the western face of the cliffs; and with the glass I could make out on its surface several white-sailed craft, as well as some that appeared to be propelled by oars like the Roman galleys and the ships of the Vikings.

The outlet of the lake was a broad river winding across the plain until it was lost in the distance. I discovered later that the river finally broke through the crater's rim in a terrific gorge, scarcely second in grandeur to the Zambesi Falls, and flowed down to the sea over the great table-lands of East Africa.

In half an hour we were close enough to the city to see that it was protected by a strong wall, loopholed in front with narrow barred embrasures for archers to shoot from, with stone watch-towers in which no

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sentries stood on guard, for the land was at peace.

From the higher level of the roadway I could see rows of narrow streets all running into a great central artery which seemed to lead straight up to the sheer, frowning keep that loomed like a shadow at the city's heart, with something cruel and menacing in the powerful sweep of its grim gray walls. Down that wide paved causeway the inhabitants of the town were already thronging like a swarm of ants, or scurrying in panic from the market-places, as we advanced straight to the city's gates.

SUDDENLY the long blast of a horn floated out across the still air. As if by magic, armed men appeared on the wall, steel cap and corselet glittering in the sun.

A dozen yards from the wall we halted.

The priests strode up and knocked upon the gate, and we waited. Presently there came the challenge of a sentry, which was answered by the request to open, and after a brief delay the priests were admitted.

Before we could follow, the great iron wings of the gate had swung back with a clash, leaving us outside.

But the horn rang out again with a burst of martial music, and a group of tall men in glittering scale-armor, armed with long-handled battle-axes, advanced along the parapet, attending a gallant-looking fellow in close-fitting chain-mail, with a long cross-hilted sword at his hip, who was plainly a person of rank, as well as one fitted by natural intelligence to play the part of a herald—often a difficult one, as history has proved.

He was young—not more than twenty-three or four—but had the trunk and limbs of a Hercules, with a gallant face lit up by a pair of piercing gray eyes that swept us all in with a single keen glance, as he took a soldier's inventory of our array. I marked, too, that this young man, who had the air of a prince and the keen, confident eye of a soldier, was several shades lighter in color than any of the others.

He came striding down alone to the edge of the parapet where he eyed us as fearlessly as a young hawk. At sight of the women he started, and a shadowy smile flitted over his face. Then abruptly, he lifted his mailed hand, with one deep-chested word which we afterward discovered was—

"Peace!"

"Skall!" (Hail) replied Eric Ivarsson instantly, speaking an archaic form of the Norse tongue, which, to our amazement, the other evidently understood, for he gave a start.

"Say on," said Eric, "Jarl or king's son—be you what you may! But look to your archers and henchmen, Jarl, lest they do us a harm from the wall, and bring ruin on you and yours, for we have fatal fire-weapons that could sweep you and them away like dead chaff, ere you draw an arrow to the bow!"

The bold words of the old Norseman, which he interpreted in a brief aside, while he watched those above, had their effect. It was both a bold and wise way to deal with those brave barbarians whose hands, as he had shrewdly guessed, were ever too ready with a weapon, in a land where life was unhappily all too cheap.

"By the bones of the dead!" quoth the man in mail, visibly awed. "You talk like a Jarl yourself. Who are you who speak in the tongue I learned at my father's knee—though men speak it here no more?" he added with a trace of regret. "Whence come you?"

The ex-professor of Oxford laughed as he looked at that noble boy in armor, where he stood staring down—a Viking every inch, from his mail corselet to the grim blade hung at his hip, as real as if he had stepped out of a Saga but yesterday!

"We are Berserkers all," replied Eric craftily, "and men from overseas; sea-cocks and adventurers all, as you may be too, if you choose! Tidings have we to bridge the gulf of years—aye, man, of Eyulf and Hengist; of Ull the Old, and Ralf o' the Bow; and many another long dead. And now, Jarl, bid your men open the gate and take us to your king, for we have a word for him. Come, is it a bargain, young sir?"

"Aye," said the young man at length, "I see that you are men of the right old breed. And for myself, I am the Prince Hakon, nephew of Fagu the King, and King's heir—unless a son be born, which men doubt. Forget not the pay, Sir Rover—such tales like me well. In with you, then!"

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And he ran down to open the gate, bidding his henchmen stand aside while we passed within.

As we passed in we saluted Prince Hakon with that wild Norse greeting "Skall!" as Eric Ivarsson taught us to do—all save the Arabs; and the pretty efforts on the part of the ladies to repeat the unfamiliar word sent a smile flickering over his handsome face, as he bowed like a *preux chevalier*. But Ingulf he never noted or seemed to recognize then, nor did any other so long as Ingulf kept to himself. And that mystery remained where it was.

SO WE went into the city, and presently the last man had gone through the gateway. I heard the ponderous iron gates close with a hollow clang behind us and a great bolt shot home. As it fell, my heart suddenly sank with the vague presage of some unknown, shadowy disaster hovering over us. Turning to look, I met De Roquemort's comprehending eyes.

"Trapped!" I said bitterly. "Mad as March hares! We have put our necks into the snare."

But Raoul de Requemort only laughed grimly.

"Mark how yonder broad street runs straight up to the keep," he said. "We could sweep it clear in five minutes, and blow the gate from its supports. A pretty adventure, my friend, but I fear you judge it wrong. We are safe enough—if I can read the face of that boy in steel."

And he turned away to whisper in Señor Torres' ear.

"It strikes me this is quite the proper time, you know, for some martial music," remarked Sherry as we stared about us at the increasing throngs of yellow-skinned people. "It will lend a triumphal air to our entry."

And he dived into a bag from which he presently fished out, to my amazement, no less than his cherished bagpipes; a little more dusty and battered, and stiff and shrunken from the heat, but with a tune left in them still. In a moment he had clapped the rusty mouthpiece to his lips and piped out a strange, quavering prelude, whose effect on that grim-eyed crowd was electrical.

The American girl burst into a hysterical laugh.

"You perfectly adorable mad Englishman!" the girl cried, clapping her hands.

He grinned and instantly started off, to the tune of "The Campbells are Coming!" The Arabs, stiffening instinctively their ragged backs at the never forgotten quaver of their own wild native pipes, fell into step behind him under the spell of that wordless command.

It was strange enough to see the silent wondering crowds fall back awed, as he marched right at and through them with unseeing eyes, the pibroch at his lips. But it was stranger still to see the dark, gaunt men of the African sands, the sweepings of all the slave barracks, blindly following a mad Englishman for no better reason than that he too was as brave as they, and that he played for them on his broken-down bellows the airs of an alien land!

We went on swiftly up the long street, keeping step with the wild skirl of the pipes, toward the frowning buildings at its upper end, which from their size I guessed to be the king's palace and outbuildings. As we went the increasing throngs of people crowded the walks on either side, showing a liking to push and jostle one another after the fashion in more civilized cities; but a stern word from Prince Hakon to his guards caused them to shove the people back, beating them with the flat of their weapons when the press grew too great.

Presently we had come to the palace wall, where a wide, deep moat filled with stagnant green water stopped us. The shrill music of the pipes brought a sentry running from the palace gates. He peered at us in wonder and went back to his fellows more swiftly than he had come. The pipes had stopped and the piper was staring curiously about him. Then, at the blast of a horn sounded by a guard, several men of darker complexions than the others —slaves apparently—began to lower the cumbrous drawbridge across the moat by the aid of a great winch and chains. Finally it was down, and in five minutes more our whole company had crossed.

ENTERING the tall arched gateway we found ourselves in a noble courtyard, paved with cobblestones, at the farther side of which a flight of broad stone steps led to the main corridors of the palace. It was built of great blocks of hewn stone—the firm-grained

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dolomite quarried from the cliffside, and once white, but now gray with the hoar of time—covered with close-twined lichens and creeping ivy. The outer side of the stone was undressed, but joined with mortar.

It was all strangely like some old feudal keep of the Middle Ages, with its grim strong walls pierced with narrow, monk-like windows set high to the sun. But there was about it, too, a vague suggestion of Eastern architecture, in the fashion of the Alhambra—that wonderful, romance-haunted fortress of the Moorish kings in Spain. I had never seen the Alhambra, but I had seen pictures of it, and here were almost the same long low galleries and carven arches, supported by pillars strangely shaped; but never a trace of the runic writings of the Norsemen—at least none that we could see.

As we came to the first flight of steps, Prince Hakon stopped us civilly, while he despatched a herald to announce our presence to Fagu the King. The man vanished through one of the vaulted doorways, and we waited, while De Roquemort spoke swiftly to El Zanek in an undertone. Like a wise general who never took unnecessary chances, he was posting his rear-guard to command the line of retreat, while he himself with the rest would walk boldly into the lion's den. He had left his main force without, to cut off any treachery from the rear. It was a master stroke that increased my respect for the man.

I saw the Arabs, at Señor Torres' swift orders, coolly turn the machine-guns to sweep both the steps in front and the palace gates. The men-at-arms and the Prince did not interfere; they were ignorant of the significance of this move on the chess-board. It was with a lighter heart than I had owned for many a day, that I watched the turn of affairs, while we waited for the King to signify his royal pleasure.

In a few minutes it was done; we held the key to the city. A long stone outbuilding flanking one side of the courtyard, which was evidently the quarters of the King's scullions and the palace slaves, stood in easy reach of the gates. Here Prince Hakon, all unwitting that he had given away the keys of the palace with a snap of his noble finger, presently found quarters for our retainers, bidding the slaves find a new domicile.

To him it meant nothing—merely the harborage of a handful of wanderers whom his steel-clad soldiers could surround and overpower at a word, or pick off one by one with their great bows that loosed as fatal a cloth-yard shaft as ever the White Company or Robin Hood himself and his merry men had launched against their foes.

How should he know—that brave barbarian, whose bold heart was as free from guile as a mountain stag's, whose mailed hand had the bear's grip of his Viking forefathers, who would have torn the prey from the iron jaws of Fenris, the pagan's wolf of fate, and whose soldier's eye was as keen and sure as an eagle's, drifting in the wild Summer sky—how should he know that the world had so greatly changed without, while he and his remained arrested as their fathers before them, and that men's cunning brains and deadly hands for centuries had been fashioning terrible weapons of destruction before which his mailed warriors would quail, as the slaves had quailed from the last remnant of the Norsemen? How should he know all this?

So he gave away the key to the kingdom, with a smile on his handsome, soldierly face—as Montezuma and his Aztecs had given it away to Cortez long before him! Meanwhile we waited for the herald to return from the King, till at last the man's tall figure appeared beckoning to us to advance, and we followed Prince Hakon up the steps.

Down the wide, tiled corridor we went, our footsteps echoing on the marble floor, until presently the main corridor divided in two and we turned into that which led to the left. Exactly alike, they swept out to right and left like the letter "Y," although each had, as I soon discovered, the same objective—the great central hall of the palace. It was an arrangement modern rulers might do well to copy, for it had its obvious advantages. Needless to say, he who went in to the King could not see him who came out; and thus friends might go in one door and foes come out the other. At the end of the corridor was a narrow, curtained doorway.

Suddenly a man in scale-armor, with a great battle-ax in his hand, stepped out from behind the curtain. He was a gigantic mulatto, with a face like a devil. At sight of the Prince he let his ax fall in a martial salute and bowed low, with the

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barbaric cringing gesture we had seen before. Stepping back he drew the curtains aside significantly. Then we passed through the door.

CHAPTER XVII

THE RED KING

A COLOSSAL man, with a barbaric, dull gold crown on his head, and a short red beard, was sitting on a raised dais facing the two doors. He sprawled there wearily enough in his great ivory seat with its massive arms made of red gold that caught a long shaft of sunlight falling from the high-peaked windows behind him. The chair in which he sat was almost as remarkable as the man, for the back of it was made of six gigantic tusks curving down over his leonine head, and its ivory feet were cunningly carven in the shape of a lion's claws.

Standing around the dais, motionless as statues, were ranged some fifty men in scaly armor, leaning on their long battle-axes. They were all tall men with dark, grim faces of a mulatto type; and as they stood there with the light playing on their axes, strange thoughts came surging up into my brain. I thought, indeed, of the long dead Varanger Guard whose invincible courage had failed to save the fallen Byzantine dynasty they served so well, and in an instant I could almost hear the wild shouts of the Berserkers come ringing out across the dim and empty silence of centuries gone!

As for the man on the dais, it needed but one look at him to tell us that he was the King—the stamp of power was on him. Even had he worn neither crown nor royal robes, it was easy enough to see that he was the master here; for the most of that idle, silent throng about him, while they watched us surreptitiously from the tail of their eyes as we advanced, never let their gaze wander far from his great, powerful, weary, florid face.

His features were cruel and sensual to a degree, it struck me as I came nearer to him, and somewhat bloated from the effects of hard drinking. He was white—or nearly white; but the lips were thick, and somewhere in the dark veins which stood out like cords upon the bloated face there was an unmistakable hint of the pollution of a lower race, which, in the King, was more pronounced than in Prince Hakon, his nephew.

Clearly the royal caste, or as it was known, "the Mohanza," had tried and failed to keep the blood pure through the long centuries of miscegenation which had finally absorbed and swallowed up the Norse conquerors, leaving only the shadow of their former greatness behind them, in their warlike customs and in the heritage of their magnificent physiques.

WE STOPPED in front of the dais and the King stood up. He lacked but an inch or so of being seven feet tall, and might have posed for a life-sized statue of Hercules. Slowly his bloodshot, steel-gray eyes traveled over and past us, and settled with a fascinated stare upon the women. A disturbed, feminine flutter went on at my elbow.

The royal stare was brutally direct. All his air of weariness fell away in an instant. He came to life like some abruptly thawed snake.

I felt a quick, involuntary grasp on my arm. A little white hand clutched it convulsively. It was Norma; she had been unlucky enough to meet the King's eyes—and at something the girl read there she shuddered!

I kept quiet out of sheer amazement at that man's enormous size—his cold, appalling ferocity of snakelike concentration. I remained absolutely frozen. But the incident did not escape Lord Chalmes, for his face had darkened and he was toying with his pistol.

There was a diversion as King Fagu's tall huntsman, whose name as we had found out was Agi, pushed his way past the crowd of priests and courtiers and threw the stag he had slain down before the King. He groveled abjectly, with the barbaric gesture which seemed to be the fashion. Presently he got up, and pointing to us poured out in his outlandish tongue what was evidently the tale of his meeting with us on the mountains and our coming through the wall of the crater.

Prince Hakon threw in a nod, and Fagu listened inscrutably. But the doctor, his head cocked off to one side, harked to him in evident disappointment. He could make nothing of the mulatto's villainously corrupt speech.

The Red King waved him off good-humoredly, as if he had been a familiar and faithful hound, and once more turned to us.

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The doctor instantly seized his cue and stepped forward with a sweeping courtly bow.

"Hail!" said Eric, and the King started at the sound of his own tongue, which as we afterward discovered was only spoken by the ruling class at court; just as French became the language of the English court after the Norman conquest.*

"Speak!" he said. "What men are you?" And his face showed his astonishment. "How knowest thou the language none but kings have spoken for generations gone?"

Eric's cock-and-bull story would have turned all of his learned colleagues of Oxford positively green with envy!

We were Vikings and Jarls' sons all, quoth he, with many a wild Northern oath; and envoys of great kings oversea. The Arabs were our slaves. The fair ladies were shipwrecked princesses of Cathay, that we had rescued after a great land-fight with an Ethiopian army to the south. And he told a red tale of slaughter. To win a princely reward, we were going to take them home to their natural protectors—all in due course, said Eric. Odin's bane be on him who laid a finger-bone on them! Better for him that he had never looked upon a woman!

He swore by the pagan gods that we would blast any who tried, with our flame-weapons (as we had done to the Ethiopians) and deliver them to the Wolf of Nastrond. Also he, Eric the Berserk, would go to the trouble to put such a blight on that offender as would make his flesh rot from his bones, until at last he died and went howling to Niflheim.

And he fixed an uncomfortable eye on the King with so intent a look—like another Ancient Mariner—that at last even Fagu's hard eyes fell before it and he sat down, strangely awed and shaken; somewhat like him who asked:

> By thy long gray beard and glittering eye,
> Now wherefore stop'st thou me?

But when Eric hinted at treaties with certain mighty potentates, which should make King Fagu greater than ever he was, the Red Kings at up straight in his ivory chair and laughed a great, deep-chested laugh.

"Mayhap your kings have much to gain and little to lose, O wanderer!" said he. "Treaties make I with none. If they seek aught of me, let them come and take it if they can! As for you who speak so boldly in the lion's lair, bethink you that they are there and you are here. They can not help you here."

"Then we will help ourselves," said Eric grimly.

"Spoken like a man!" quoth the King. "Ever I have loved bold hearts, though men dub me 'Fagu the Butcher,' behind my back. But fear no treachery from me. For the passing hour you are safe. What use to cut the harp-strings ere the song is sung—to break too soon the tablets from the world without? Perchance I know more than you think of your grim, smoke-wreathed cities and the strange things men have fashioned over the seas. Ask me not how, O wanderers!"

His ironic, even tones died mockingly away and there was silence. The red blaze of the dying sun, streaming down behind him, had stained him a vivid crimson as he sprawled chin on hand in his barbaric throne and turned his red beard to fire.

Only the wrinkled doctor had understood. To the rest of us the King's face was a baffling study in hypocrisy, in which burned eyes of lambent flame, terrible to see.

A FAINT stir ran through the throng of courtiers. The curtains of the two doors had moved, and footsteps came echoing down the marble floors.

A barbarically beautiful girl came out of one door first. She was a splendid creature, almost white, with great melting, liquid eyes, and hair like some wonderful tropic night. As she came gliding up the hall another faint sigh of admiration rose and died away, for the elfish breeze from the curtained door had slightly stirred the soft gauze-like fabric of her white robe, and half revealed the perfect lines of a form such as the genius of some great sculptor has now and then infrequently given to the world.

The girl came straight up to Prince Hakon, passing the crimson satyr in the chair with a curt, contemptuous little nod that brought a darker flush to Fagu's florid cheek, and stopped.

*The common people spoke another tongue—apparently a corrupt form of the Abantu language; though it was interspersed with many Arabic words, and its origin is open to doubt. It was comparatively easy to learn. But it was weeks before my companions, with the exception of the Marquis de Roquemort, who is a born linguist, were able to express themselves with any sort of success in the court language of the Mohanza—the ruling class of the extraordinary, isolated "People of the Skull." I have accordingly assisted my good friend, Sir Alan Severn, in setting down much of the conversations recorded in this book.—Footnote by Dr. Eric Ivarsson, of Oxford University, F. R. G. S.

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The boy in mail looked at her, half vexed. "Phaïma!" he said, and that was all.

Somehow I sensed the tie between the two when I looked at their clearly chiseled faces—so different yet so much alike. Afterward we learned that the prince was her half-brother.

Her eyes roved swiftly from one to another of us and appraised us each in turn—lingering a little upon Lord Chalmes—until presently they darted past him to the women and she gave a little gasp of astonishment. Her eyes opened wide with interest.

She went over Mrs. Rountree first in minute detail, all in a well bred sort of way at which nobody could possibly take offense. It was worth seeing, to watch the play of naive expression on her face as she instantly sensed the presence of something very different from her own wild, primitive world in the American woman's superb poise.

Next she examined Alline, and got evidently a distinctly new sensation. It was as if she had discovered by herself some new specimen of a very odd and very brilliant flower. But she could not understand where its perfume came from, though she picked its queer petals to pieces!

And at last she came to Norma. Presently her proud little head drooped and a rich red blush came sweeping up into her clear, olive cheek. She had found out where the perfume came from! For whatever it was she read behind those three calm, proud, pitying faces, it brought a choking, breathless sigh from her parted lips, and a vague mist of tears into her great wide eyes.

Poor savage! She was already learning the bitter lesson of civilization.

Then she saw Ingulf for the first time. He stood there leaning on his weapon staring at the Red King with a face like a granite mask. But his steel-gray eyes glittered like diamond points. There was a strange dignity in his strong, stern, impassive face. She watched him, half fascinated; she could understand that sort of person, and in a moment all her embarrassment was forgotten, for apparently there seemed to be something oddly familiar about him to her, which she was trying hard to recall. But she failed, as every one else had failed to solve the weird puzzle of his past.

My mind reeled with the thoughts that came surging into it. I thought of the strange Saga of Ull the Viking, which was coming true, step by step; and of that terrible story of ill-starred Ibrahim, told by De Roquemort in the blazing firelight months ago . . . which had also been true!

What was the Thing in the pit? . . . Who was Ingulf? . . . Was he the descendant of the old pirate "Ingulf Blackhair," who had founded the line of Valkyrian kings? Had I hit upon the master-stroke to shake the iron resolve of even that indomitable dreamer, the Marquis de Roquemort—the tacitly confessed envoy of Leopold's sordid Protectorate?

But was it true? Had Phaïma or had any of these people ever seen Ingulf before? For if they had, the years had altered him beyond their power to unmask. And I watched the two strangely baffling faces curiously.

With the queer sensation of being covertly stared at, which is like a sixth sense to most people, he turned around involuntarily and met her eyes full. And Ingulf, the silent adventurer, the soldier who so seldom smiled, smiled now and looked back at the girl with admiration written eloquently in his face; while Phaïma suddenly colored up to the eyes. The whole affair had been as good as a play.

BUT we have forgotten the man who came in from the other door. He came in as noiselessly as a ghost, like a tall, black shadow; and it seemed to me that those whom he passed on his way toward the dais shrank away from him with a kind of horror, as if he had carried the plague.

He was a very tall man, as tall as the King, but almost as fleshless as a skeleton. He was nearly coal black. Yet the dark features were aquiline, with the high, broad cheek-bones of an Egyptian mummy. He wore a black robe, on the breast of which was worked out in glaring white relief the strange insignia of a skull. His face was absolutely devoid of expression; he might have been a dead man so far as concerns the play of emotions on the average human face. But the most terrible thing about him was his eyes. They were green!

As we guessed rightly, this extraordinary personage was the high priest of the "Temple of the Skull," nicknamed by the populace "Fangari the Black," or simply "the Black Priest," although that is stepping

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behind the scenes, as we all must do often enough in our lives and histories. After the King, he possessed the power of life and death in the country—and not infrequently made use of it to get rid of his enemies and confiscate their porperty to his infamous priesthood, after the usual fashion of the world's dark places and ages.

So Fangari the evil, with his ghastly mummeries and human sacrifices to the mysterious Thing or ghoul in the pit, had gone on waxing greater in the land, at the expense of much mortal suffering, till there was probably no limit to his greed and his fatal power until we arrived on the stage.

Yet there were two creeds in the land, as there were two tongues; the dim, grim old pantheistic worship of the pagan gods had not yet died out among the royal class. For them, the Valkyries still flew and wheeled above the battle-fields they fought, and Niflheim and the pool of Hela still engulfed the souls of the unwary, while above it all, in Valhalla, still sat Thor and Odin and all the rest of their mighty crew, watching with their great eyes the deeds of men below, and applauding or cursing as the case demanded, as they quaffed the mead-horn between whiles or harked to the golden harp-chords floating faintly through the dim halls of the Norseman's half-human heaven, peopled by gods whose thoughts and actions were strangely like those of men.

It was bad enough. But bad as it was, it was infinitely preferable to the merciless devil-creed of the priests—the monstrous survival of some dark Ethiopian myth of the past, by help of which Fangari and his familiars had cunningly contrived to set their nameless yoke upon the necks of a superstition-ridden race, ruling them by the terrors of a personal devil and a visible hell.

The black priest turned his expressionless face and dreadful green eyes upon us with so deathly a gaze that we shuddered at its sheer malevolence, or rather at its utter absence of all human animation. Then he leaned over and addressed the King ominously, with a grim directness that made us feel uncomfortable. We would have been even more uncomfortable had we guessed that he was demanding the removal of ourselves to the underground "Temple of the Skull," and our servants to the limestone quarries to labor on the public works.

The tall, white-robed girl beside us, watching his face, gave a slow sigh of horror, and tears sprang up suddenly in her lovely liquid eyes. I saw Prince Hakon's features grow tense, and instantly sensed something wrong; while each courtier around us seemed to catch his breath. In the strange silence that fell abruptly in that room, all eyes were riveted upon the King's impassive face. But if there was a struggle going on behind that utterly soulless mask, he gave no sign of it while the slow seconds dragged by.

Then at last the tension snapped, and Fagu shook the high priest off with a half-humorous, malicious smile. The Red King held the mastery in his mailed hands, and to do him justice, he alone feared neither man, priest nor devil, though it is like enough he had a deeper purpose of his own, which he kept inscrutably to himself. The priest flashed at us another strangely evil glance, and then glided like a black shadow down the hall and out through the curtained door. It seemed to me that those about us breathed a sigh of relief when he was gone.

There was silence still, while the crimson bar of light behind the dais suddenly went out and twilight crept into the room.

AS IF it had been the signal for their appearance, several handsome female slaves came in simultaneously from each door, carrying flaming rushlights in their hands, and glided swiftly along the walls, touching in rapid succession with the lighted rushes some fan-like stone pipes set into the carved masonry at intervals, at about the level of the eyes, after first drawing out a small metal plug located in the top of these fan-like pipes, the plugs being allowed to dangle at the end of short golden chains for future need in extinguishing the lights.

It was a most ingenious arrangement for utilizing the unlimited supply of natural gas which, as I learned later on, flowed beneath the whole city and was stored in natural reservoirs. We were informed that it was only within the present century, or to be exact during the reign of the previous King, that a mad philosopher named Odag the Wise had finally perfected the present system of lighting the city—being afterward burned for his pains by an ignorant mob incited by the priests, as one who had

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tashly dared to tamper with the secrets of he Unknown.

A revulsion of sentiment had later set in, and a colossal bronze statue of Odag holding a flaming torch aloft now stood in the principal square, and was the object of much veneration among all classes of the people. It was a bitter commentary upon the terrible reward which the world, in all ages, both barbarous and civilized, has so often meted out to its greatest benefactors!

As the half-nude figures of the slave girls flitted silently to and fro, fan after fan of blue-white flame leaped out behind them as if by magic. Then in a sort of sinuous, rhythmic glide, their forms swaying as if to music, they converged all together at the center of the room. Suddenly they grouped themselves gracefully into living ladders, and two huge central chandeliers burst into weirdly brilliant flame. It was all done so swiftly that, before I had realized their final purpose, the whole great hall literally blazed with light, and with a last daring pirouette toward the dais they were gone.

Almost at the same moment the whole city below began to glow and coruscate with a blaze of light, as I saw through the huge loopholed windows behind us that overlooked the main square. At intervals of about half a mile I could see tall columns of bluish flame blaze up at regular distances along the principal streets which were already crowded with people. Their shadowy goblin figures passed to and fro in the maze of lights like the inhabitants of some world of dreams, and I could hear the faint roar of their traffic come floating vaguely back to us through the palace windows, mingled with the confused cries of hawkers in the market-places.

For in Valkyria, the capital, which was evidently densely populated, the hour of lighting the city was the favorite time of all classes of the people for taking the air, amid the cool breezes of the tropic evening, yet with the streets lit up almost as brightly as by day.

It was a sight to haunt the memory, and one that I never forgot—Valkyria bursting into bloom like a great fiery flower till it was literally ablaze with lights, in the singular, throbbing hush of the swift tropic twilight, like some star-gemmed city builded by hands more than human. As I looked it seemed but half real, and I began to wonder whether I was awake or dreaming till I saw the others watching the lights blaze up against the darkening sky. And Alline, forgetting where she was, clapped her hands rapturously.

"Aladdin's palace!" she exclaimed. "An Arabian Nights' dream! . . . It is wonderful—perfect!"

But Norma drew her back.

"Alline!" she whispered warningly. "They are staring at you!"

And then at last my eyes came back to the room in which we stood.

It was a huge room, hardly less than a hundred feet long and perhaps sixty feet wide. The tall windows that let in the light were nobly vaulted and embrasured like the windows of some of the gigantic old castles which still stand in parts of Europe to this day: grim reminders of a grimmer past—an age when might was right and men cared little for the peccadillos of law and property so long as their swords were sharp and their feudal strongholds, which amply protected master and man from the unpleasant consequences of their acts, remained all but impregnable to the simpler weapons and warfare of their times.

And as I looked around this room and at those in it, it was plain enough to me that by a strange accident of fate they had been set back more than five hundred years in the scale of the world's progress. Here men lived and died as they had done in the thirteenth century, with small thought of the morrow or heed to the hereafter — with fiercer passions and stronger sinews, and cruder virtues, perhaps, but with fewer vices also.

AS THE dancing girls vanished, another bevy of beautiful slaves glided in with tankards of mead and ruby wine which they passed around to the company in tall golden beakers and medieval drinking-horns. And then began such a scene as might have been a part of the poet's dream:

> . . . . . And in divine
> High-piping Pahlavi, with wine! wine! wine!
> Red wine! The Nightingale sings to the Rose,
> That sallow cheek of thine to incarnadine.

We found the wine excellent, but the mead was too sickish sweet for my liking, though it found favor with the ladies. They were courteously conducted by their fair servitors to a row of low marble seats near the dais, carelessly strewn with several magnificent lion-skins.

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It seemed to me that the King's cold eyes played up and down the faces and forms of the ladies somewhat more freely than was courteous, and that the royal gaze appeared fixed on Norma in particular. Over her pale, beautiful face I fancied I saw a shadow of horror pass swiftly, and she shrank back involuntarily from the too ardent stare of those lambent, glittering eyes, set like slumbering flames in the bloated face that seemed to leer like a satyr at the company.

Among them glided languorously the beautiful bacchantes, at whom many of the wine-flushed, ever-thirsty throng of courtiers threw boldly amorous glances as they moved half sensuously from group to group, or stopped to pour the sparkling red wine and foaming brown mead into the golden goblets which they presented smilingly to the guests and to us also.

Watching this strange scene with tense eyes and fascinated by it, yet repelled, I saw Norma look back appealingly at me with a nameless terror in her eyes. And as I met that electric underplay of involuntary appeal for protection against something impending, that none of us could find a name for or even shape into words, a maddening question suddenly crept into my thoughts and set my brain reeling and groping for an answer.

Why had she looked at me like that—at me, first of all? Why, indeed, when so near to her, almost at her side, stood the tall, careless figure of Lord Chalmes? Had even this brave, quiet young English peer a better right to protect her against the whole world—that man to whom I never doubted that she was affianced before this mad wind of chance had caught her up into its terrific whirl and set her down more than a thousand miles from all of the safe, sane, civilized world she had known!

She would go back to that world in the end, and I was very certain that he was the man she meant to marry. And I knew no good reason why that return need be put off, since we had been received by the Valkyrians with fair words, as it seemed, and in a crisis could probably keep them at bay.

For even as we stood—a handful of desperate outlanders against so many—I knew that in five minutes we could have turned that lordly hall into a red shambles before the mailed men could ever use their axes. Perhaps the Red King knew that also; he was by far the cleverest man in the kingdom, and perhaps the thought may have sobered him somewhat. But as the wine began to flow freer and tongues to wag noisier we deemed it more prudent to withdraw.

Eric rose up and craved the royal leave and it was granted. For a fat feast was being laid smoking on the royal trenchers elsewhere, and King Fagu with all his courtiers, after the way of barbaric potentates, would presently fall to work to drink himself senseless. Which, from long practise, he was able to do very effectually.

So we went off to the quarters which had been obligingly evacuated for us by Prince Hakon's order in a wing of the palace itself; and a noble suite of rooms they were, looking down on the great courtyard where we could see the lounging figures of our own valiant ruffians from our wonderful, embrasured windows, and catch the grim glitter of the Maxims in the shadow of the wall.

"A pretty castle in Spain, on my soul!" said Raoul de Roquemort musingly, as he took in the whole extraordinary scene in a sweep of the eye: palace and moat and courtyard, and the blazing, weirdly beautiful city below. "And a noble capital for a king! God grant we may never have to sweep those streets clear with the *mitrailleuse*, the 'red rain of death!' "

"When you do," I threw in quietly, "take heed to the Red King's mailed soldiers and the sample of archery that we have seen. This race is the last of the Vikings, and they will yield to no man."

He wheeled and surveyed me narrowly with his falcon eyes.

"Pooh!" cried he. "They will never pass our guns. We are their masters, I tell you, after all."

"Heaven grant we are!" was my reply.

So greatly did Raoul de Roquemort, resourceful emissary of Leopold and gentleman-adventurer with a courage worthy of a better cause, misjudge what manner of men were these with whom he had to deal.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE CROWN OF VALKYRIA

AND now for once we had our fill of idle days and lordly feasts, while obsequious attendants came and went at our beck and call. With Prince Hakon for our friend and mentor, time flew by unheeded in that

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marvelous, medieval city of imperial Valkyria, where men's lives and pastimes were those of more than five centuries ago.

We had dropped into their midst like queer fowl from a world they had never seen; and the Valkyrians were human enough to be very curious about us and our outlandish ways, and the beautiful ladies who had arrived so wonderfully out of the Unknown. They would stop to stare at us whenever we appeared on the streets—as we did when we liked unchallenged, often at twilight, in the strange hush of the African dusk, when the greenish lights of the city would blaze up weirdly and abruptly, until it seemed like some fantastic vision out of another world.

It was a sight that Norma and Alline and Mrs. Rountree never wearied of watching; and we risked it oftener than was prudent. There was a singular, wild beauty about it all that sank into our brains and our souls.

There was a singular beauty too in the half-veiled olive faces and swaying, stately forms of the graceful Valkyrian women who glided rather than walked along the white-paved streets—a gleam of languishing black eyes; a shadowy smile from red lips; a sleepy flash of coquetry, and a fascinatingly feminine hint of their indisputable right to be admired, on which it was impossible to shut the doors of our impressions. It was all a part of that bewildering stream of life whose changing current ebbed and flowed without a pause through the narrow streets, in the lazy, Oriental air, under the broad, red-rimmed Eastern moon. And over it all hung the haunting glamour of romance.

But if we were like strange birds from the sea, we were hawks with beaks and talons which they learned to fear at last. They found out the purpose of the queer blued things that were ever ready to the hands of the white-faced rovers from the south, without which, as they had marked well, the foreign Jarls were never seen afoot.

It chanced upon a day when, with the ladies all in tow, we had sallied forth from the palace and wandered happily in the late afternoon through a maze of narrow, winding streets, past the crowded market-stalls and quaintly medieval booths of silversmiths and armorers, down to the dusty quays along the water-front, where a row of low stone drinking-shops faced to the idle wharves, and here and there a long, black, empty galley washed aimlessly at anchor on the yellow tide of the river.

We had turned homeward while the dusk was falling. And then . . . was it fancy or was it the Black Priest's tall, shadowy figure that we had seen gliding up the dim street ahead of us, till at length it looked back and vanished abruptly in the dark entrance of a silent court?

As we turned the corner, a roistering band of half-drunken revelers lurched suddenly across our path, and as if by accident, blocked the street. They were an evil-faced crew; all in their leather jerkins, with the tools of the armorer's trade in their hands, and led by a huge ruffian with a tall red feather in his steel cap, who barred our way and leered at the women with a derisive, drunken smile.

"Aho here, comrades all!" quoth this worthy with a laugh, in the thick, burring speech whose drift we were beginning to catch in a vague, misty fashion. "Here be some pretty fowl that have flown afield out of their silken nest. At them, drunkards all, and let each catch his nightingale while he may!"

In a trice, Raoul de Roquemort's terrible yard of steel, which he wore here like one to the manner born, was out and flashing palely in the Summer moonlight. But with a grim laugh the tall man waved his henchmen back, and dropping the tools of his trade, whipped out a long straight blade and they fell to work.

Sharp and sudden the end was. Like a cat, the Marquis had glided inside that drunken ravisher's futile guard and had run him through. He dropped dead with a horrible, short, choking sob.

"Pah!" muttered the Marquis as he wiped his rapier contemptuously on the stark form. "A De Roquemort has become at last a butcher of sheep!"

But with this, the dead ruffian's fellows must needs set up a baying in the street and leap at us with drawn blades over their leader's body like a pack of hungry wolves.

Ruthlessly we did it. It had to be done, and we did it. And of the song of war and death that was to float one day over those silent squares on the wild voices of their fabled Valkyries, we played the grim prelude that night by the water-front.

Good or evil, it was done! When our smoking weapons were empty there were nearly a dozen corpses huddled in a dark

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heap on the broad stone flags, and a single survivor had fled aghast, his footfalls echoing faintly down the empty street. But if the Black Priest had set a snare for us—as we had guessed—he had lost his prey.

Covering her face with both hands, Norma sobbed out brokenly—

"Let us go back!"

And we went.

AFTER that unpleasant episode we confined our sightseeing to the safer quarters of the city, and our lovers' rambles to the friendlier daylight. Prince Hakon, whose word was law, had the affair hushed up somehow; and the long days drifted by like a procession of old-world pageants, each staged in its own strange setting—the strangest that ever I had seen. We were beginning to speak the language, very badly, and by keeping my eyes and ears open I had found out much about the country of the Valkyrians.

There were two other towns in the Northern Province, built like Valkyria itself inside the great chain of extinct craters, one of which, Aluki, was said to be a place of considerable size, but its inhabitants had not advanced as far in the scale—in architecture, for instance—having scarcely progressed beyond the primitive stage of mud walls. The sanguinary civil wars that for six hundred years had kept down the population of the country, the periodic rise and fall of half a dozen dynasties in as many centurie , and their own fearfully enforced feudal serfdom to the terrible mailed kings of imperial Valkyria, had left them a rough race of soldiers and horse-breeders rather than artisans.

Only at the capital itself had the finer arts risen to their comparative zenith among this semi-barbaric people—so strangely cut off by terrific natural barriers from the great seething, teeming, beautiful, restless, weary world without, which, indeed, generally grinds men's bodies into ignoble dust and their immortal souls into seared travesties of faith, far more effectually than our present "advanced civilization" is frank enough to admit. But that world they had never seen. . . .

Valkyria held the military keys of the kingdom. Through the iron gates of the capital ran the road to Aluki, and only through Aluki could an army come to Khar, the next town of any importance. Valkyria stood like a menacing white sentinel at the only gateway to that vague, mysterious, outside world.

But they could not pass that gate, for in the memory of men few had ever gone out, and of those few none had returned. Of the few who had gone, only tradition preserved the names of Ull the Viking and his homesick ship's crew, who had stood here so long ago—a battered company of fameless mercenaries, under their dead and forgotten flag; homeless, under an alien sky—here with the changeless sun of Africa blazing down on their rusted and broken steel harness, but powerless to beat out the fires of the wanderlust in their indomitable hearts.

To Dr. Eric Ivarsson it was like discovering some earthly Valhalla, and he slapped his thigh and swore a most mighty vow that he would write such a pamphlet on the Vikings as would set all the archeologists of Europe gabbling like geese in a fen. Forthwith he fell to work with a gusto upon that writing, seconded by no less an ally than Alline, who as a consequence must needs coax Sherry (armed to the teeth) daily at her pretty heels.

Followed by a gaping dozen of Prince Hakon's guards, those three went through the crumbling, motley streets of Valkyria, like fanatical servitors of science, questing for runes and ancient carvings and sundry circumstantial evidence to bear out the doctor's learned monograph; but unfortunately, with only indifferent success.

Meanwhile I waited tensely—waited for the Marquis to play out his hand; and Mr. Cecil Rhodes' long cherished empire-building schemes seemed in a bad way of fulfilment.

THERE was no mistaking that the Frenchman held most of the trumps. But when and how would he play them? I wondered what his keen wits suspected, for he too waited warily!

There was something afoot. Most times he would talk aside in undertones with the King's heir, Prince Hakon—the two had become inseparable; and as they whispered together meaningly, it struck me sometimes that they had very much the air of conspirators, plotting melodramatically upstage.

But there was something significant and something sinister in De Roquemort's

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masklike, set smile—an icy chill in the way he would sweep that falcon glance of his contemptuously across the cold faces of the Red King's guards whenever that impassive steel line came striding past his Maxims that faced the palace steps there in the courtyard where we often lounged at noonday in the shade of the cool white walls or sat smoking by the curiously carven fountains that threw their rainbow sprays of shimmering water-drops up into the clear, lazy air.

And in Prince Hakon's hawk eyes there would blaze up an answering gleam. What did it mean? Were those two—the brave, quiet soldier of fortune, and that gallant barbarian with the wild blood of unremembered Vikings still running hot under his bronzed, olive skin—plotting to topple the Red King off his throne?

Were they? I would have sworn that they were! But if they were, the Marquis kept a curb upon his tongue. Perhaps he had guessed that another power was afoot, that another flag might be unfurled when the storm had burst. So I held my peace and waited. Let him fight the Red King's soldiers first, and then for the final masterplay of wits between the Briton and the Gaul.

But of the Red King himself we had seen very little so far. He had shut himself up in his royal shell; and only vague, whispered rumors had reached us of the royal pastimes: of drunken debauches, of wild orgies, of horrible, nerve-shaking cries that had rung out in the night and echoed through the empty corridors.

And then of a maimed and blighted courtier — the royal favorite once — who had come stumbling and groping on a morning out into the placid sunshine, with his eyes picked out — perhaps they had seen too much—and his rash tongue silenced forever by a sharp dagger-blade, drawn knowingly across its roots. He would never tell what he had seen!

Then one day a colossal, coal-black slave was admitted to the main ante-room of the princely suite from which young Hakon had courteously turned himself out like a gentleman, at our need; and gliding straight up to Norma, where she sat, brightly talking and jesting with the Lady Phaïma, he laid a great gold casket in Norma's lap.

"From the King!" he said, cringing almost to the marble floor. "For the White Lady of Beauty, with the face like a star!"

He bowed to the floor again and was gone.

NORMA opened the casket mechanically. And there in its yellow silken setting lay blazing up at her a well-nigh priceless royal coronet worth a king's ransom!

She dropped it swiftly and turned pale as death, while the crown by some strange prank of fate leaped from its ancient bed and rolled slowly along the marble tiles to the feet of the Lady Phaïma, where it came to rest at length with its glowing crust of jewels flashing up at her wickedly.

I saw Phaïma's lovely, flower-like face literally turn gray with fear—saw her stoop and pick up the crown, uttering never a word, but her big dark eyes had dilated with a slow stare of terror.

Then we all fell to examining the beautiful, priceless thing. It was cast from very pure gold, wonderfully carved and chased, and was crusted all over with sparkling gems of every size from a pea to a filbert—a molten flame of diamonds and sapphires and emeralds—all cut in polished facets by some cunning lapidary's art; and set into the front of the coronet, near the top, there glowed like a great red eye the most enormous ruby we had ever set eyes upon. It was as big as a robin's egg, and cut as well as the best stones to be found in the London shops today, although the crown itself had every appearance of extreme antiquity!

Perhaps in the world's wild youth it had crowned the regal head of some dusky barbaric queen, or perhaps of some sensuous oriental beauty of a greater race who had worn it imperiously in her turn till she too had vanished into the gulf of time. Perhaps it had been the royal heritage of some black-eyed Eastern princess who had been human enough to marry and to forgive her Viking conqueror—the stalwart, gallant sea-rover whose ruthless, biting blade had hewed down all her kindred before he offered her the rough atonement of his love.

There was no telling what heads that royal coronet had lain upon in its day. Yet as I looked at it, I swore a great oath that it should never gleam on Norma's. But Prince Hakon was staring at this singular scene with a dark flush of shame on his cheek and gray eyes that glittered like the diamonds in the crown.

"The crown of Valkyria," he said bitterly,

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"thrown away by a drunkard—like a bauble to a beggar!"

And he turned away darkly with a dangerous flush, but met De Roquemort's rapier-like glance and instantly collected himself. As the soldier of fortune nodded curtly, the Prince's expression changed and became impassive and cold—for he was shrewd enough.

Presently, arm in arm, the short, strong figure in immaculate modern flannels and the towering one in medieval mail swung into step as if with a common purpose, and passed out together through the marble archway. Their heels beat out a long tattoo down the vacant corridors till it died away at last.

Norma shivered as if a chill had gone through her heart! She had understood only too well what that royal gift conveyed without words. Like enough, before her eyes rose a weird picture she had already seen—the picture of the satyr in the ivory chair, with his smoldering eyes of flame. . . .

"Send it back!" she said shuddering. "I shall dream that I can hear that monster coming for me in the dark!"

Her voice quivered and broke.

"Oh Alan—take me away from here—anywhere! Only take me away, before it is too late. But first send that gleaming, beautiful, evil thing back!"

THE Honorable Robert Piers Croydon, Viscount Chalmes, who was listening intently, bit his lips till the blood came. He had been overlooked, ignored; but his lordship was oddly silent. He had always his unforgetable code of a gentleman, and he held to his code without a sign.

As for me, my pulse was racing at a mile a minute, for I had guessed which way the wind blew in a storm.

"Back it goes," said I, "to that devil who sent it—and by the last of the race of Jotunheim! I shall be happy to go with him on that errand," and I beckoned to Ingulf, who, seeing that he was wanted, left his place by the door and saluted impassively.

"No—not you, Mr. Severn!" said Norma, turning pale. "Not *that!* You would go to your death!"

"I will go!" I repeated doggedly, and made a sign to Ingulf who quietly picked up his great sword.

I stretched out my hand for the casket, but the Lady Phaïma had sprung up and waved me back imperiously.

"Nay," she said swiftly, "you are mad! You would but throw your lives away. The King is like a mad beast when he is thwarted in his cups. You shall not go!"

Her voice had sunk to a singular, thrilling whisper, but every word was distinctly audible.

"Hark to the Valkyrs calling!" she went on in her strained, hushed tones. "Do you hear the footfalls of the Jotuns coming nearer; tramp, tramp, tramp, until they shake the earth? Look! Can you see that long, keen white sparkle in the sun? One day, my lords and Jarls, you will see it too, perhaps, in this fair, unhappy land that cries out to the frowning gods in Valhalla against the base-souled butcher who rules his people with a red hand and a heart of stone!"

Her face altered and the look of prophecy faded away abruptly. In spite of myself I was staring through the window, half expecting to see some strange sight conjured up out of nowhere by her wild words. But there was nothing but the white, almost deserted streets, asleep in the blazing sunlight.

"What do you mean?" I said, amazed.

"That one day, Jarl, strong arms may strike home at last, and yours with them. You can wait. Let a woman's wit outmatch the King's—as a woman has ever been his undoing.

"Aye," she went on, "best for this pretty, wicked plaything to go back now to that royal drunkard, ere the storm bursts! I will be your messenger—a woman. He dare not harm a Princess of Valkyria!"

And before any one could detain her she had snatched up the crown of Valkyria and was gone.

She was right, after all, and we let her go. But as she went, Ingulf glided out like a shadow behind her. My astonishment and curiosity changed to a grim smile of amusement as I thought of the mad pranks that fate was playing with us all!

What befell in that interview with the royal pagan sitting in his great hall, the Princess Phaïma never described. But men told with awe and wonder in their tones how a white vision of wrath, attended by a grim Berserker with a great glittering sword had burst in upon the King as he sat in his banquet hall, drinking long and deep with

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all of his mead-sodden, half-tipsy crew of courtiers. How that indignant vision had read him such a homily of biting, scornful ridicule and bitter wit as sobered him somewhat, and made all his stout henchmen chuckle into their flagons, while the tall Berserk had leaned on his long, two-handed sword and laughed.

And how the Red King smote the nearest chuckler senseless with a blow of his great paw, and would have boxed the lady's pretty ears in his fury had she not whipped out a wicked little sharp dagger under the royal nose, and then walked out of the hall before those amazed and shaken revelers could recover from their stupefaction. And in truth none of that awed company cared to dispute the lady's way with that grim Viking who stalked at her heels, so fierce were the stranger's eyes as he had turned on them all like a wolf at bay—ere he had left them to their thirsty thoughts, and was gone! And how the Lady Phaïma had maliciously dropped the royal crown of Valkyria into a brimming mead-tun they had broached in the banquet hall, where it lay sparkling at the bottom of the clear brown mead for all men to see.

Whereat the Red King laughed a great laugh and set to work to drink up that ill-omened cask of mead himself, to its intoxicating, sweet brown lees; and men averred that he got most royally drunk about it. But drunk or sober, it did not turn him from his purpose as Norma found out in the end. . . .

AFTER that, events flew fast. There came a gorgeous seneschal with a golden baton, whose dazzling, parti-colored hose and jerkin would have put to the blush the modern French scenic posters of the Moulin Rouge. A barbaric blaze of colors almost shrieked from him; he was all purple and red and gold, but there the comparison ended.

The man was enormously obese—a pallid, yellow, quivering mass of unhealthy human flesh, rocking and teetering upon alarmingly feeble legs that seemed to bow in grotesque denial under all that gluttonous weight, as if they mutely disapproved of carrying it.

Planting himself pompously in front of the doctor and flourishing his glittering gilded staff under old Eric's huge hawk-nose while he rocked to and fro on his unstable nether limbs, that seneschal gurgled out a stream of words. In brief, King Fagu honored the foreign Jarls by desiring them to sit at meat with him straightway at the royal board.

There was no choice but to obey. And Eric sent back this bold and politic reply: He, Eric the Viking, and his friends and fellow adventurers, Raoul of Gascony, Ingulf the Wanderer, and the Thane of Croydon, with Captain Alan the Berserker (&c., &c.), had sat at meat with other great kings ere now; and so would not fear to sit at the board of this King.

"The lion and the mastiff's breed," quoth Eric, "could sup well enough in peace out of the same platter; for they had ever fed best the jackals and the ravens."

The somewhat overawed seneschal went back with that message and delivered it, stammering, to the Butcher; but men said the King only laughed a royal laugh.

And taking half a dozen of El Zanek's wild-looking Arabs for a retinue, we went, with Prince Hakon and his men-at-arms to keep us company.

Into the dim, huge hall we went where King Fagu sat drinking a great beaker of heady wine with his mailed henchmen, and sat ourselves down at the lowest row of benches. Beyond the dais where the King sat I could make out the dim outlines of the tall ivory throne at the far end of the hall, and behind it an alcove shut off by heavy crimson curtains glimmering in the weird reflected glare of the street-lights that were beginning to blaze up below in the main square of Valkyria.

As we sat down, several of the remarkably handsome and shapely slave-girls, who were naked to the waist, for they wore only short leopard-skin kirtles falling to the knee, began to set aflame the fan-shaped stone chandeliers with their flickering rush-lights, and I saw the King lean over and beckon to us fron the dais.

"Step hither, noble Jarls," he cried as we advanced, "and drink a cup of this good red wine! Fear not—'tis as safe as a girl's lips, or safer, like enow! 'Twas never the Butcher's creed to use aught but cold steel!" And he laughed at his grim jest.

"Thanks, Sir King," quoth Eric, coolly taking up the cup with both hands and looking him hard in the eyes, ere he drank, "but that is a game two can play!"

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"By Thor's hammer, well said, Sir Viking!" And the King swore a great oath. "Ye are men of the true mastiff breed! . . . Aye, that was a gallant message you sent some while agone by this overweighted seneschal of mine. Yet he would have made it out black treason, an' I had lent a ready ear to his fool's counsel," he laughed royally.

Eric bowed low with a ready grace.

"A kingly rede and worthy of the Lion of Valkyria!" he said; and I thought, "What a King that man might have been, after all, under a nobler star!"

WE SAT down at the royal board and began to eat the savory venison pasties which the slaves had set before us at a sign from the King; washing the food down with the red wine, for the mead was too sweet and sickening.

But two things I marked: first, that the King's grim, silent body-servant standing behind his settle, who was our old acquaintance Agi the bowman, was watching us narrowly and never took his fierce eyes off our faces; and second, that as the wine went around, King Fagu drank deeper than we liked to see.

"By the sword of Odin!" quoth the King, thawed visibly by the mellow wine. "Ye are men of some wit, 'tis plain. Hark you, Jarl, outlander as you are, there is a path by which a man might climb to high honor in this fair land if he be so minded—the path that many a fair and noble lady of Valkyria would give her all to travel till the end of her days. Yet how if a fair foreigner's starry face haunts my dreams! How if I am minded to make you and yours great lords of my kingdom?" And he leaned over and stared at Eric meaningly.

But Eric looked straight into the Jotun's eyes.

"Sir King," he said coldly, "you are mad! The thing you desire can never be. Beware, O King, of a woman's beauty—for blood will run like water, as of old, wherever that fatal star glows red! Let dreams bide . . . ere it be yours."

The Jotun laughed a terrible laugh.

"Have a care, wanderer," he said, "or the Lion may show his teeth! . . . I say it shall be! Aye," he added, "how if I send swift for the fair Lady Norma and bid her choose now—in this room! How can ye prevent it?"

A frozen silence fell. "So it has come at last!" I thought, drawing my revolver deliberately.

But the Red King never stirred from his seat, while I weighed the chances swiftly. Why not cut the knot of Norma's fears forever? . . . My grip closed convulsively on the revolver-butt. . . . But I could not bring myself to murder him where he sat.

Sometimes, when I think of all the misery and human lives it might have saved, I have regretted afterward that I did not pitilessly put an end to his red career in time, with a bullet through his brave, ruthless heart.

And up leaped Raoul de Roquemort, his eyes blazing.

"Death of my blood!" he cried. "King, you will go too far! Think you that I and these men will stand idle and see the Lady Norma made the plaything of a barbarian—King though you be?"

"Barbarian!" cried King Fagu, livid with fury. "Bridle that cursed tongue of yours, Jarl! Down, men! This is my affair, not yours. . . . Back!" For he had caught the ominous flash of steel around the board, and with the cool mastery of men for which he was remarkable—it had made him the greatest man in the kingdom—he quelled their rising uproar with a contemptuous, half blood-curdling laugh.

Unawed he had the singular presence of mind to take up the tall tankard by his elbow and drain it without once looking around; he was well aware that it was the one way to allow hot blood time to cool. But his hand shook as he set it down empty!

"Enough!" he said frowning. "We will let the Lady Norma choose at another time. . . . Drink! O wanderers. . . . And go in peace! . . . "

And he set us the example by drinking deep, while I sat fascinated, watching him drain cup after cup of the strong red wine and brown narcotic mead till his face flushed dark red, and I thought no living man could sit upright and hold all of that drenching flood of liquor which I had seen poured down the Jotun's throat. The scene was not without a grim pathos of its own.

"Drink! . . . " he muttered thickly, reeling up unsteadily and snatching a golden goblet from a slave. "Drink deep, O wanderers—ere it is too late! Be merry while you may, for today flies swift, and tomorrow is yet unborn! Dimly I hear the

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far-off clash of steel come ringing nearer and nearer—and hear the Valkyries calling to me from the halls of Odin! . . . Away! . . . The gates of the Caverns of Sleep yawn wide! . . . Valhalla awaits us all. . . . Fare-ye-well! . . ."

He drained the huge goblet to the dregs and lurched forward, reeling across the banquet-board with a dull crash. As he lay stupefied amid the scattered litter of the feast, the armed guards silently closed around the king in a protecting circle of steel—half raising their glittering axes; but it was done mechanically, as if they were well accustomed to such scenes.

AT ONCE four colossal negro slaves appeared carrying a gorgeous stretcher, upon which they gently lifted the drunken form of their master and bore him impassively away within the curtained alcove behind the dais where a great couch of ivory and gold, strewn with leopard-skins, loomed dimly behind the crimson curtains.

"The Butcher is drunk as ever!" quoth a short, red-nosed man in a jerkin of many hues, staggering tipsily to his feet and wagging his bullet head accusingly amid a general burst of laughter. "Gods! . . . How he did pour the good red wine down that great throat of his—as if he could find no bottom!"

"Peace! O Loki the Fool!" the captain of the guard broke in sternly. "Yap not at a better drunkard than thyself, like a cross-bred cur at his master's heels! An' thou wert by mischance a King, I'll warrant thee that we should see a swifter conclusion to the feast, and discover thee rolling among the wine-lees under the board—ere it was properly begun!"

But the red-nosed man had buried his face deep in a great tankard of mead. He emptied it with one long thirsty gurgle, ere he looked around.

"And thou—Azir the Politician," quoth he, "if thou wert King, we should see neither feast nor flagon—aye, naught save a black blight of priests mumming in the banquet-halls from sunrise till eventide!"

The shaft flew home, for the soldier was sheepishly silent. Prince Hakon whispered carelessly:

"'Tis only the court fool . . . a droll knave he is . . . with a biting tongue. Come with me. . . . When the lion is asleep, the jackals make merry at the feast!"

And mechanically we followed the prince who pushed his way unceremoniously past that thirsty throng of feasters. They had finished gorging themselves, and were setting to work at last to get mellow drunk.

Five minutes more and we were out in the white, silent courtyard, under the dark-blue tropic sky ablaze with a million haunting stars. Gladly I leaned down over the quiet, starlit fountain and laved my throbbing temples with the cold, clear running water, and listened to its cool splash in the marble basins.

So suddenly that it startled me, a tall form stepped out of the shadows and clawed at De Roquemort's arm, and I caught the flashing glitter from the whites of his eyes, under his long white *haik*. It was the ex-slaver—El Zanek, the Arab.

"Ha, my bold little *Giaour!*" he said in guttural Arabic. "Is it you? We grow tired of this waiting in the dark! When will we pick the lock of this white town to which men have lost the key? When will the blood-rain begin falling? When will it be, Pasha?"

I heard the Marquis mutter briefly:

"Be patient, you old hyena! The blood-fever is in your veins again; see that you cool it well! By Mohammed's beard and hair, it will come! And we shall see these yellow sluggards pouring out of their hives like a swarm of wasps. Go back to the guns."

"Allah is merciful!" said the Arab. "We can wait." And he vanished silently as he came.

We too went back unchallenged to our quarters and slept for many hours—the restless sleep of those over whom the shadow of fate hovers intangibly.

TO BE CONCLUDED

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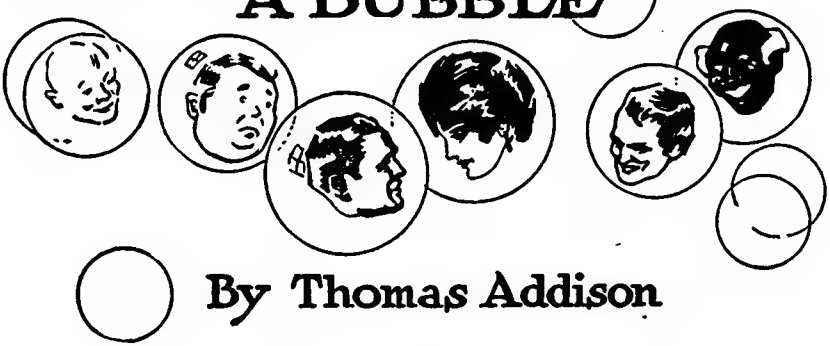
COME-ON CHARLEY BUYS A BUBBLE



By Thomas Addison

SCORE $840,000

MR. PERCIVAL TEETERS had found a new friend, and he was sorely in need of company. Since the business on the Jersey marshes, in which Mr. Charley Carter by a simple expedient turned the laugh on the confidence fraternity and thwarted a raid on his bank balance, Mr. Teeters had been much alone. Miss Dorothy Grant was the cause of it. This young lady, the self-willed and devastatingly charming daughter of Mr. George Francis Grant, the sporting millionaire, was the candle to which Charley played the moth. He fluttered about it to the imminent danger of his wings, and to Mr. Teeters' loss of his society at least three nights in the week.

Hence, when Mr. Simeon Huncks crossed Mr. Teeters' path and evinced an interest in him, the lank and lonesome private secretary fell upon that welcome gentleman's neck and clasped him to his heart. Mr. Huncks was an unsentimental sort of person, approaching middle age, a little short, a trifle stout and with a hawk nose and eye to match .

He met Mr. Teeters as ten hundred thousand men have met before—he asked him for a match. It was in the Hotel Rirebien rotunda. The time was the second Sunday in Lent, shortly after six o'clock at night. Charley was at the Grants'.

Mr. Teeters was moping in a corner by himself, smoking a cigarette and wondering what he should have for his solitary dinner, when Mr. Huncks dropped down beside him. Mr. Teeters produced the requested match, Mr. Huncks returned his thanks, and this exchange of courtesies led to conversation. It was adroitly fostered by the sociable stranger, and in ten minutes he was possessed of Mr. Teeters' history, and Charley's, from the cradle to their present point of progress toward the grave.

"I thought your face was familiar, but I couldn't place you at first," said Mr. Huncks. "I've seen your picture in the papers, and Mr. Carter's. You boys certainly have made a noise here in the little old village."

"I guess they've heard us when we moved about," admitted Mr. Teeters modestly.

"I guess so," laughed the other. "There are folks in this town who think they're pretty smart, but they can go to school to you and learn a trick or two. Eh?"

Editorial Note—*Samuel Drew*, a New York lawyer with a $10,000 bequest for Charles Arthur Carter ("Come-On Charley"), a clerk in a small New Jersey town, yields to a whimsical impulse (and other things), and tells *Come-On* this money is only the advance payment on a $2,000,000 bequest to come to him if he makes the $10,000 grow to $1,000,000. (Wants to see what a man can accomplish with just the *reputation* of having $2,000,000.) *Come-On* accepts the news placidly, moves to the Hotel Rirebien in New York, and becomes target for all the "con" men. Good-natured, easily approachable, yet somehow he always emerges winner instead of loser. Not such a fool as he seems, quick to learn from experience, doing very little talking, he adds a little each time to his original $10,000. *Percival Teeters*, his light-headed and slangy secretary; *Ball*, his newspaper friend; *Joe Link*, his boxing-instructor; and *Drew*, the lawyer, generally figure in his adventures.

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Mr. Teeters winked at him.

"We got a bagful we haven't showed 'em yet. Wait till they come around again and ask us to perform."

"I'd like to see the fun," chuckled Mr. Huncks. He glanced at the clock over the desk. "Six-forty! What do you say to a bite of something—with bubbles on the side? I'm loose. Wife left for 'Frisco this morning."

MR. TEETERS hesitated. Was this an invitation or double checks? Champagne at another's cost was a thing his soul rejoiced in; but at his own expense it was a harmful and pernicious drink. Mr. Huncks seemed to sense his companion's state of mind.

"I'm buying," he announced. "When I meet a man like you—both eyes open—it's a pleasure to entertain him. You're not dated up, I hope?"

"I ain't got a thing to do but eat your dog," responded Mr. Teeters facetiously. "Charley's doing goo-goos with a fairy up the avenue, and I'm down here as merry as a mouse in tin trap. Where are we going to swallow the knife—in here?"

"I was thinking of Paul's," said Mr. Huncks, "but you have to reserve a table there in advance. It's always crowded; and Lent don't cut any figure with it."

"Paul's? Where's that?" queried Mr. Teeters.

Mr. Huncks looked at him astonished.

"You don't know Paul's? Down by Thirty-eighth Street? Where've you been eating all this time?"

"Here mostly," replied Mr. Teeters, feeling a little ashamed of himself. "And at Chatty's and Mouchard's."

"Oh, those joints!" Mr. Huncks grunted contemptuously. "I'll take you to a real restaurant some night this week, you and Mr. Carter. We'll fix up a date. Huh, Chatty's! Say, down at Paul's they're so busy every night the cashier don't have time to stack the money. Throws it on the floor till after hours and counts it by machinery. I ought to know."

"Hey? How's that?" asked Mr. Teeters.

"I'm financially interested in the place, that's how," Mr. Huncks informed him. "And I'm in the hardest kind of luck, blast it. Got to sell. The madam is nuts on the Coast, and we are going over there to live. I'm simply staying here till I can close out a few things I'm into. Paul's is one of them. Between you and me I'm carrying on the business. But come on in to dinner and I'll tell you about it. Maybe they've got a duck in there we can eat without an ax; and they can't fool me on the wine. I was born with a cork in my mouth."

"Ha! You ain't pushing me," bragged Mr. Teeters. "I got a Pink Seal birthmark on my left shoulder-blade."

They went in to dinner. When they came out two hours later, Mr. Teeters, just to show that money, when you knew how, could be swept up from the floor like bread crums, tossed a lordly quarter to a bellboy who had not done a thing for him but get out of the way.

II

MR. CARTER came home with a rose in his coat and a light in his eyes that spoke of a rapturous evening. Mr. Teeters was waiting up for him. He was sprawled out on the couch in the sitting-room, smoking a black cigar to keep him awake. It was striking twelve as Charley entered.

"Listen!" cried Mr. Teeters, sitting up.

Charley paused inquiringly.

"Wedding bells!" cackled Mr. Teeters. "Me and Little Eva's going to jump through the ring together. We are going to play house in popper's back yard."

Charley grinned. His secretary's pleasantry, crude though it was, did not jar on him. It was in tune with his fancy. But he said, with elaborate unconcern:

"Thought you'd be in bed, Skeeters. What's doing?"

Mr. Teeters arose from the couch and crossed over to his chief.

"I got a hen on for you, Come-On. A nestful of eggs. It's for tomorrow night—I mean tonight; it's morning now. Don't you tell me you got another goo-goo date. This is biz—a chance to make your million."

"Go ahead," Charley bade him.

He took off his topcoat, first carefully removing the rose, and sat down. Mr. Teeters perched himself on the table and swung his long legs to and fro as he talked. He related his chance encounter with Mr. Simeon Huncks, detailed with gusto the items of the twenty-dollar dinner that liberal gentleman had "blown" him to, and

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told of his connection with Paul's, with which place Mr. Teeters professed an intimate acquaintance.

The truth was, Mr. Huncks had so expatiated on its city-wide reputation that Mr. Teeters, who abhorred a show of ignorance, had argued himself into the belief that he had known of it all along and, indeed, had dined there once when he was a trifle hazy in his upper works. Hence his faulty memory.

"He's got to sell quick," concluded the secretary, "and he ain't going to count the beans too close. His wife's got a bee on 'Frisco, and she's shooting over there right now on the choo-choo. She's a bear, Huncks says, and the way I size it is, he's afraid she'll leave him in the discard if he don't chase her up. By gum, catch me getting hooked up to any skirt! Double trouble—that's the dish they hand you!"

CHARLEY merely smiled. He pitied the untutored wretch before him. How could he know that with some people marriage meant the end of trouble—the beginning of the rainbow route to Eden?

"Go on," he said forbearingly. "What about the eggs?"

"Ha!" ejaculated Mr. Teeters. "What about 'em? Why, they're ready to hatch, that's what! All you got to do is buy the place and clean up ten thousand a week clear profit. Huncks is doing it; he said so. And if it wasn't for his wife he wouldn't think of selling."

"Too bad," observed Mr. Carter.

Mr. Teeters hopped down from the table. His mustache wiggled and his china-blue eyes glistened. He was plainly moved.

"You think it's another con game, but it ain't," he asseverated. "Gollamighty, Come-On, it's a restaurant! It's there! You can see it—put your hand on it—eat it! It's Paul's! Everybody knows Paul's. You got to tag your table in advance or eat off the floor. Say, Charley, they make money down there so fast they have to count it by machinery. Huncks said so. And he's straight. Ding it all, don't I know a con man when I see him? He ain't got any of the signs about him, this guy Huncks. And he hasn't even mentioned selling you the shop. He's got a party for it barking at the door right now!"

"Oh," said Charley. "Then what's the excitement all about, Percy?"

"Pink Pills!" exclaimed the secretary, losing patience. "You got to beat the other boob to it and sneak his spoon away. Tonight! Huncks has given us an invite to eat a few with him at Paul's. He wants to meet you before he goes out West. He's just a good fellow, that's all. Me and him hit it off like a pair of pouter pigeons."

"What does he want for the place?" Charley asked. Mr. Teeters' earnestness impressed him.

"A hundred thousand. And cheap as dirt, Huncks says. Earning ten per cent. on the money every week, right along! A week, understand?"

Charley failing to respond, Mr. Teeters became more urgent.

"Ten thousand a week! Do you get it? In a year you'd have half a million. Straight money, too. A regular business. Merry Moses, Come-On, that wren—I mean," he hastily amended at Charley's quick frown, "the girl up on the Avenue would be proud of you." This was a sly afterthought, and it told.

"Oh, all right," said Charley, rising and affecting a yawn. "I'll go. Nothing better to do tomorrow." And he went off to bed, taking his rose with him.

MR. HUNCKS called for his guests at the Rirebien. He shook hands with Charley warmly.

"Heard a lot about you, Mr. Carter. Always pleased to meet a thoroughbred."

"Same to you," said Charley.

"We'll walk, if you don't mind," suggested Mr. Huncks. "I want to look in at Chatty's and Mouchard's. I'll show you something."

Mouchard's was the first stop. Mr. Huncks led the way in. He brushed aside the cloakroom harpies and strode to the entrance of the main dining-room.

"What d'ye think of it?" he inquired behind his hand of the two. "Looks like somebody's funeral. Ain't enough people to pay the cook. No use going upstairs. You'd find the waiters playing solitaire. Come on!"

They went out and on to Chatty's. Here they found another array of empty tables. Lent was taking its toll. Mr. Teeters counted the people.

"Fifty-two," he announced.

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"One for every week in the year," jeered Mr. Huncks. "Big business! Come along. Let's go hunt a noise."

They struck off down the street for Paul's.

"Hard luck you have to sell," Charley said compassionately.

"Ain't it?" Mr. Huncks wagged his head mournfully. "I suppose our friend here has told you why. I expect a party around tonight to close a deal with me. If Paul was here I wouldn't sell. I'd let him run it and take my profits. He built up the place, you know, and I backed him. But the war called Paul home to the colors—French reservist—and I had to carry on the business myself. Easy work, and I hate to quit, but the missus—you know how it is, or you would if you was married. I've simply got to give the place away and skate across to 'Frisco to please the girl."

This sentiment appealed to Charley. He glanced at the rotund Mr. Huncks admiringly, and said:

"Good old sport! Wish you luck."

"Look at that!" called out Mr. Huncks abruptly. "See 'em come. Wait a minute. Watch 'em!"

He stopped his friends directly under a blazing electric sign and pointed over the way. It was Paul's. A short flight of broad steps led to the lobby of the restaurant, and people were passing up them in twos and threes, with occasionally a larger group.

"Seven o'clock," said Mr. Huncks. "In half an hour you couldn't push a pin in there without sticking somebody."

AS THEY watched, a hatless man—very bald—in a dinner-coat came out and stood on the topmost step. He peered around him and then across the street. Mr. Huncks took off his hat to mop his forehead—he was warm from his walk—and remarked:

"I got thirty thousand dollars' worth of wine in the cellars over there, boys, from sherry to champagne. Some drink! What? Let's go over and sample it."

He replaced his hat and pioneered the way to the other side. The baldheaded man was gone when they mounted the steps. The head waiter conducted them to a table in a corner; it was removed some distance from the others, and there was an air of privacy about it. Mr. Teeters was jubilant; wine was presently to flow.

"Say, Come-On," he whispered, "this ain't so rotten. Hey?"

Mr. Huncks spoke to the head waiter.

"Same old business, Peter. Packing 'em in!"

"Only fairish, sir," returned Peter with a shrug. "Monday, sir; always a little slow on Mondays."

"Pretty good, Peter, just the same," opined the proprietor of Paul's. "Who is going to wait on us?"

Peter motioned to a man hunched into a deprecating bow who was standing near.

"Tony, sir. Shall he bring the cocktails?"

Mr. Huncks nodded and turned to Charley.

"I've got an A1 steward, my boy. Name is Frascati—Italian. I told him to get us up a dinner we'd remember. If it don't hit you right, squeal."

"You're the doctor," Charley answered, grinning. "Own medicine. We can take it if you can."

"Ha!" exclaimed Mr. Teeters. "I guess yes. He knows a duck from a didapper."

"How does it strike you?" asked Mr. Huncks complacently of Charley, who was looking about him. "Not so bad, eh?"

"Great!" commended Charley.

It was a tremendous room, gaudy with gilt and flaring frescos. At one end a piano, flute and violin were working stoically through a popular song. Nearly all the tables were filled, and newcomers were constantly arriving. The hum of voices rose high above the music.

"Makes you think of Chatty's, it's so different," tittered Mr. Teeters.

"Seventy-five tables. We can seat three hundred," Mr. Huncks told them. "Every table worth forty dollars a day. That's three thousand—" he paused impressively—"and half of it is clear profit."

"Gee," said Charley. "Going some!"

The cocktails were before them, and he sipped his glass thoughtfully. Mr. Teeters drained his at a gulp.

"If I owned this place I'd sleep in it every night for fear it would get away from me," he declared.

"Don't!" Mr. Huncks begged him plaintively. "I want to forget it."

"What's the trouble over there?" Charley was watching the door. "Somebody cutting up."

Mr. Huncks laughed comfortably.

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"Oh, that's an every-night affair. Turning 'em away. Late comers. No more tables. I have to reserve my own twenty-four hours ahead or go without. How do you find the soup?"

III

IT WAS a rather neat little dinner Mr. Huncks served his friends. And from soup to nuts wine flowed with every course—sherry, chablis, claret, champagne, port and brandy. Never in his life had Mr. Teeters run the gamut of the wine card at one sitting like this. And neither had Charley. Ordinarily abstemious as a Quaker parson, this night the bridle slipped his hold.

Mr. Huncks was so jovially insistent, so pleasantly pressing with the bottle that Charley could not find it in him to resist. As a consequence, when they came to the cigars he looked upon the world and all therein contained with a benignant eye, and his host, especially, he regarded as a friend and brother. Mr. Teeters freely admitted his condition; he exulted in it.

"I'm all lit up like the Boston boat," he proclaimed, casting a moist eye around him. "Stand me up on a table, Huncksy, and save the gas."

Mr. Carter waved a hand at his secretary and grinned amiably at his host.

"Merciful Skeeters. Real name. Wise. Keeps his fingers crossed. Toes too."

Mr. Huncks was about to reply in kind to this waggery when he caught sight of two men who had just entered. He frowned and said:

"The devil! Here comes Wiggins."

"Wiggins?" questioned Mr. Teeters.

"The man who's going to buy me out. And he's got his lawyer with him. I told him ten o'clock. He can't wait, I guess. Say, you boys don't mind if we fix the business up right here, do you? It won't take long—just a paper to sign and get Wiggins' check. They've been through the inventory—wines, stores, linen and all that. Everything O. K. We won't be five minutes. Sit tight and smoke. It is the edge of the evening yet."

But Mr. Teeters would not sit tight.

"Keep 'em away! Shoo 'em off! We got a speech to make," he yapped.

"What do you mean?" Mr. Huncks stared at him blankly.

"Come-On, you ain't going to let this get away from you, are you?" demanded Mr. Teeters feverishly. "Creeping Cats! It's a cinch! Ten thousand a week!"

Mr. Carter bestowed a tolerant smile on his secretary. He was willing to make allowances for him in his then condition. He would remind him of a fact he had overlooked.

"Too late, Skeeters. Higgins—Biggins—what's his name—Giggins? He's got the call."

Mr. Huncks leaned over and spoke earnestly.

"I'd rather sell to you, old man, than to Wiggins. You're a friend—gentleman—thoroughbred. If you want to buy maybe I can fix it. Quick! They're here!"

"Ten thousand—oh gosh! Come-On!" implored Mr. Teeters in a hoarse whisper.

Charley made a large gesture of acquiesence. He felt that way.

"Fix it," he said.

Mr. Huncks arose and met Mr. Wiggins. The gentleman was in a dinner-coat, and he was deplorably unfeathered up above. A dim notion crossed Charley's mind that he had seen Mr. Wiggins before somewhere, but he could not place him and did not try; a pleasant lassitude was upon him, and exertion was a trouble.

Mr. Huncks drew the two aside, and they conversed vehemently for a few moments. Mr. Wiggins gesticulated angrily and at length, shaking a threatening finger under Mr. Huncks' nose, he turned and marched away. Whereupon Mr. Huncks brought the other man over to the table and introduced him.

"Mr. Carter, Mr. Teeters—Mr. Elliott Jones. A lawyer. He'll fix our little matter up in a jiffy. The papers are all drawn. Only has to substitute your name, Charley. And I'll tell you—to show how far I'll go for a friend—it cost me five thousand to buy Wiggins off. He's so mad his clothes don't fit him. Tony, bring us a bottle. Pink Seal, and shoot it along."

MR. CARTER and his secretary breakfasted in their rooms the next day. It was ten o'clock. The sun was streaming cheerily in through the windows, but they viewed it with a languid eye. They were not feeling very well. In fact they were heartily ashamed of

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themselves, for neither had the slightest recollection of how they had reached their beds. That last bottle—the one Charley ordered when the keys to Paul's were formally transferred to him—had sealed memory in its chamber at that particular stage of the proceedings. What followed was a blank.

Charley on arising had taken Dorothy's rose from the glass on his dresser and put it out of sight. He wrapped it in tissue paper and laid it in a drawer to wither fragrantly away. He could not bear to look at it. It seemed to him just then he could never face Dorothy again. And he had an engagement to dine at her house that night!

Mr. Teeters had no such mournful thoughts to harass him. He was concerned wholly with the state of his head. It felt as if it did not belong to him, as if he had exchanged it for somebody's else, as he might his hat. He set down his coffee with a petulant expression.

"It's boiled mud! Gollwoppit! I feel 'sif I'd tried to push the elevator up with my bean!"

Charley continued with his egg in silence. Mr. Teeters went on, solo pitch:

"We was stewed good and proper last night, Come-On. I'm bubbling yet. But you pulled off the trick. Ten thousand a week. Clear profit. I wonder what old Drew will say when he hears it? And Joe and Teddy? Say, we'll have 'em around at Paul's to dinner and show 'em where the lobsters live in Little Old New York. Hey?"

The telephone rang sharply. Mr. Teeters jumped and put his hands to his head.

"Helafire!" he whined. "That girl is too almighty sudden. I thought somebody'd hit me!"

He got up sluggishly and answered the call.

"Come-On," he announced, "a guy named Catty—or something like that—has blown in downstairs. He's from Paul's. Says you told him to come around this morning. Want to see him?"

Charley had no remembrance of the appointment, nor of Mr. Catty—or whoever it was—but he was not minded to betray himself to his secretary.

"Sure," he said sententiously, and bit into his toast.

THE caller was a weedy, sallow person with a little black mustache. It was waxed and twisted at the ends so tightly it seemed to lift him up on his toes. He carried a leather portfolio, and when he sat down handled it as if it were filled with lyddite or some other high explosive—and so, shortly, it proved to be in its effect on Charley.

To reduce a painful episode to its elementals, it was Mr. Angelo Frascati, the steward at Paul's, who presented himself to the new proprietor. He delicately reminded Mr. Carter—perceiving instantly the need of it—that he, Mr. Carter, had been pleased the night before to retain his, Frascati's, services. And he furthermore recalled to Mr. Carter's mind that he, Frascati, had intimated there were certain matters of importance it would be well for them to take up together without delay. Hence his, Frascati's, intrusion at this early hour on Mr. Carter's privacy, and his profound apologies.

To all this Charley listened stolidly, and then requested Mr. Frascati to "get busy." This the gentleman proceeded to do, and with the most astounding results. When he took his departure Mr. Teeters, who had contained himself only by the most heroic effort, fell over on the couch squealing in dismay.

"We bought a bubble and it's busted! It was a phoney bunch of dinner sharks Huncks rang in on us last night—a free for all. Those 'at leisure' Gents and Jennies that crowd you off the pave around by Forty-second Street."

"Sure," said Charley. "Pretty slick. Got to hand it to him."

He was grinning. Frascati's call had cleared his head. The humor of the thing appealed to him. He had let Huncks get him drunk—for the first time in his life—and unload a dead business on him as easily as dumping sand from a cart. It was straight, too, up to a point. It was a bona fide sale of what Huncks had to sell, which wasn't much—the lease, the chattels and a handful of supplies. Elliott Jones was a certified, if shady, lawyer—Frascati knew the man—and he remembered now they had called in a notary from somewhere; he was in waiting, of course.

Yes, it was a pretty slick game Huncks had played, and no doubt he had cashed his hundred-thousand-dollar check and was

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chuckling over it at that minute. He had not said a work about the liabilities—the overhead expenses, wages and like trifles, and Charley had not thought to ask; he forgot such things were. In plain terms, he had been an ass who had not even brayed.

Charley went to the telephone. Mr. Teeters sat up on the couch groaning dismally.

"What you going to do, Come-On?"

"Get Mr. Drew. Advice," said Charley.

"Oh Lordy! I can hear him now!" wailed Mr. Teeters. "Where's that paper Catty left? I ain't sensed it—not all of it—yet."

WHILE Charley talked with Samuel Drew, Esquire, the attorney who, as the reader knows, had with a word sent Charley forth into the world a reputed millionaire, Mr. Teeters drew a chair to the table, stuck his fingers in his ears, and studied the memoranda Paul's steward had left with them. Exclusive of the tableware and such things, and insurance, which for obvious reasons was paid, the assets and liabilities Mr. Carter, in his brief hour of expansion, had taken on stood thus arrayed:

LIABILITIES

Rent—1 mo., near due	$4,000.00
Lights—1 mo., near due	125.00
Wages—50 people—arrears	800.00
Wines, etc. (bills)	2,500.00
Supplies, etc. (bills)	1,400.00
Music—arrears	60.00
Sundries	75.00
	$8,960.00

ASSETS

Cash in drawer	$6.75
Wines, etc., on hand	650.00
Supplies, etc., on hand	340.00
Bills receivable	.....
	$996.75

In brief, Mr. Carter had purchased for one hundred thousand dollars spot cash debts of nine thousand dollars, had assumed a three-year lease at forty-eight thousand dollars a year, and had incurred running expenses of approximately two thousand dollars a week. In exchange for this he had received a thousand dollars in supplies and the furnishings. The "good will" was an asset that lay entirely in Mr. Huncks' imagination, and was perceptible only to himself. Altogether it was a tidy stroke of business—for Mr. Huncks.

As this percolated into Mr. Teeters' intelligence he raised his head and goggled vacuously at the wall.

"Gollamighty!" he croaked. "Conned to a finish!"

IV

CHARLEY left Mr. Teeters at home and drove downtown to Mr. Drew's office in Pine Street. His interview with the lawyer was not hilarious. Mr. Drew, through various telephonic channels, had assured himself of the validity of Huncks' bill of sale, and he now told Charley precisely what he thought of him.

"All I can see in it," he wound up, "is that you've paid a fortune for a lot of china and a smile."

Charley grinned at him.

"Got seven hundred and forty thousand left. Manage to rub along. And there's Uncle William's two millions."

"Don't you count on that," warned the lawyer. "You've got to get your own million first."

"Not counting on it," Charley answered soberly, though with a look that belied his tone. "Chickens before hatched. Eggs may be no good."

Mr. Drew was then and there tempted to own up to the hoax he had played on him, but he could not bring himself to the scratch. That the boy suspected it was a belief he was beginning to cherish, yet he shrank from confessing himself a petty practical joker and he let the opportunity pass. Instead he said:

"Look here, my young friend, you are liable for thirty-three months' rental on that morgue—a hundred and thirty-two thousand dollars! Sell the lease for what you can get; that's my advice to you."

"Will think it over," returned Charley. "Want you to take dinner with me tonight. Paul's. Teddy Ball's coming. And Joe Link. Already phoned them. My treat. Own the grub anyway. What's left."

He grinned again and went away, leaving the portly advocate sputtering in his chair.

Charley drove around to the Olympic Building in William Street. Mr. George Francis Grant, Dorothy's father, had his offices there. Charley had made up his

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mind to tell Mr. Grant the whole story. A man who would allow himself to get drunk and play the fool was not entitled to associate with a gentleman's daughter. It would be pursuing the acquaintance under false pretenses if he did not tell. He would ask Mr. Grant to withdraw the dinner invitation for the night and explain to Dorothy the reason.

It was with a very serious air he entered the Grant Estate offices. He was shown into Mr. Grant's private room, and he went to the heart of his visit without preamble. The millionaire listened with an odd expression. His keen eye never left Charley's face. At the close he said quietly:

"Suppose you leave it to my judgment to tell Dorothy as much of this as I think fit. And as for dinner tonight, we will call it off at my house and try Paul's. I'd like to look the place over, and I know Dorothy would. It is my party, understand. No argument."

This wholly unexpected turn to the affair took Charley aback.

"By George! I say, Mr. Grant! I—I didn't hope for this," he stammered. "It—it's fine of you, sir."

The other gave him a kindly glance.

"It was rather fine of you, my boy, to come to me as you did. And I'd lay odds you won't overstep the mark again."

"You can't lose," Charley assured him earnestly. Then he bethought himself of the invitations he had extended for the evening. "Gee, I'm in a fix," he added, and explained the situation.

"Bring them all," Mr. Grant enjoined him. "Joe Link, the box-fighter! I know him well, and glad I do. He's square, and that's a man's measurement wherever you find him. Dorothy will delight in him. Perhaps—" he laughed pridefully—"you've discovered she's not just like other girls?"

"I have," said Charley gravely.

AND so it came to pass Paul's entertained a special dinner-party of seven on the first night of Charley's incumbency as proprietor. Mr. Grant sat at the head of the table. Charley was on his right and Dorothy on his left. Next to her sat Charley's boxing-master, the renowned Joseph Link, a little conscious of his evening clothes, and "taking the count," as he would have phrased it, to the girl's pervading charm. Mr. Teeters was seated by Mr. Link, and Mr. Drew and Mr. Teddy Ball of the *Evening Scream* sat across from them. The crowd of the night before was conspicuously absent.

Mr. Teeters had recovered from the paralysis of the morning. He was of a mercurial disposition, was Mr. Teeters, and quick to respond to Hope's smallest whisper.

"Say, Come-On, they turned 'em all away tonight before we blew in," he cackled humorously.

"Charley, that's a good one Huncks handed you about Paul," scoffed Teddy Ball. "Called back to the colors? Right! He's been dead two years."

"Charley's best move is to close up and sell the lease," said Mr. Drew.

"Let us talk it over," suggested Mr. Grant, who had a reason for it. "It looks like a bad bet, but I've seen a long shot win more than once. What do you say, Dorothy?"

Miss Dorothy Grant had maintained an unusual silence up to now. She had been studying the place with a speculative eye.

"I have an idea," she announced. "Do you want me to tell it?"

"Sure," said Charley eagerly.

"Are you willing to spend some money—oh, quite a lot?" she asked him.

"Anything you say," he answered.

"Very well. What we want to do—" that "we" thrilled Charley—"is make this restaurant unlike anything you can find in New York. We shall have to make it so different it will be the fad to come here. The place, the food, the service—everything must be different!"

"A rather large order, Dorothy," laughed her father. "How are you going to fill it?"

Dorothy puckered her brows into a thoughtful frown.

"Why," she replied, "we want to get away from all the gingerbread work in these other restaurants—all that pastry-cook gimcrackery they smother you with. My idea is to go to the other extreme—in a way."

"Ha!" exclaimed Mr. Teeters. "I get you. Make a 'hurry up the hash' hall out of it."

Dorothy smiled. She enjoyed Mr. Teeters.

"No, not that," she said. "I'd wall and ceil this room with long-leaf yellow pine—the heart of the wood, wonderful of grain.

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I'd have a red brick floor, smoothed to a perfect plane. Over there at the upper end I'd have a fireplace—old Yorkshire—so big you could put a bed in it. It should have a crane, and settles by it, and a flambeau on either side, and oak logs burning when the weather called.

"And I should have flambeaux around the walls. Pine cones, each an electric bulb, should star the ceiling. I'd have rustic tables and chairs—not the scratchy kind, but solid, sure, without a nail or joint to catch on. And I'd have other things—I can't decide on them now—and, oh, yes, in that far corner I'd have the music concealed behind a screen of woodbine; and if they played above *piano* I'd discharge them. And with all this I'd have a service so absolutely faultless you'd go away in a dream of satisfied desires." She laughed.

Joe Link spoke, ponderously emphatic. It was his first remark.

"Faith and I'm thinking the lady's rung the bell."

CHARLEY said nothing. His gaze was fastened on Dorothy. A faint flush, the excitement of the moment, tinged her cheek. She was so ravishingly fair it made his heart turn over as he looked at her.

"What would you call the place?" questioned Teddy Ball. "Paul's is a Jonah now."

The little frown came back between Dorothy's violet eyes.

"In all the rush and hurry here—all the uproar and confusion—we ought to have something opposed to it, something—How would 'Restawhyle' do; spelled with a y to make it odd?"

"Great!" applauded Teddy. "It's got advertising value. Say, Charley, I'll weigh in with a lift for you. If you'll let me write this story up, the whole business—Huncks and all—I'll get it on the front page. Free!"

"Huh," grumbled Mr. Teeters. "And make monkeys of us. I guess not!"

Mr. Drew offered no comment; he was counting up the cost. It was a gloomy outlook to him. He did not like it. But Mr. Grant was not so inclined.

"It sounds rather good, Dorothy, as you've outlined it," he acknowledged. "But how about the cuisine? Your Restawhyle will have to set a pace, and you can't beat Mouchard much on a *mousseline de saumon* or a *suprême de volaille.*"

"Oh, that gibberish!" cried Miss Dorothy with a pretty pout. "We're going to eat English in our restaurant, dad. If you want a fried egg you'll get it—not *un oeuf frit.* We are going to have some things here those men down in Wall Street will come running for—things they've heard about and read about, and never had a chance to try."

She glanced around the table and explained:

"We are from the South—Georgia. I'll bet you—" Dorothy was no linguistic prude —"you don't know what Hoppin' John is, or beaten biscuit, or barbecued red snapper, or egg-bread, or sweet-potato pudding, or rice-puffs, or baked——"

"For heaven's sake stop!" begged her father. "You've ruined my dinner, child."

"You see!" Dorothy nodded triumphantly at the others. "He's only one. And there's a million like him—people who live here and come here. He'd give fifty dollars right now for a corn pudding like Old Mammy Jane used to make. Of course we shall have the regular dishes—all the usual parade—but you wait till a good black Georgia darky, with honey in his voice and a bow a courtier couldn't copy, draws out your chair and sits you down to golden waffles in the morning and chicken gumbo at night! See if you won't come back and bring the folks."

"By George!" exploded Charley. "Wish I could see Huncks. Shake his hand. Did me a good turn."

"You'd better do a little figuring first," cautioned Mr. Drew.

Charley waved the advice aside. What were mere dollars in a case like this?

"Will you plan it? Boss the job?" He shot the questions at Dorothy impetuously.

The girl laughed and looked at her father.

"I'll give a helping hand," he smiled. "I'll send Sam down to Macon to get your darkies for you, old timers, gentlemen in black. And I'll loan you Sam, to start off with, for head-waiter. He will know how to handle the crew; everybody couldn't do it. As for Sam himself, he's a cash asset. He could seat an emperor and make him feel it was a favor."

"He could!" asserted Charley. "Makes you feel as if he—he'd laid a wreath on you," he finished, reddening at his own unwonted fluency.

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Dorothy gave him an approving glance. Sam, the Grants' grizzled old negro butler, had "raised" her, he would have told you had you asked. Any one who stood well with Dorothy stood well with Sam. By that right alone they were "quality folks," which in Sam's purview was equivalent to a line in Burke's, De Brett's or the Almanach de Gotha.

MR. LINK spoke again, and there was wisdom in what he said. To anticipate a bit it was he, not Dorothy—though he would never claim it—who heaped fame on Restawhyle.

"There's a thing we've forgotten," observed the former fistic champion. "It's the drink. Ye can feed a man and he'll be happy. But if ye want to make him loosen up—begging the lady's pardon—and take the rubber off his roll, put a drop of something wet before him with a tickle to it. He'll buy balloons to pelt the stars with. Not—" he added, heavily apologetic—"that I'd be casting stones at any good friend of mine. God forbid!"

A burst of laughter greeted this, and every one looked at Charley—every one but Dorothy. Her eyes met his serenely, and she did not laugh.

"We shall have those things—all the wines," she said to Mr. Link.

"Of course," he answered. "But 'tis a better thing I have in mind. One drink! A friend has just invented it. A secret he holds it, and well he may. I've traveled far, little lady, but never did I see the Gates Ajar—wide open, speaking truth—till I laved me tongue in Mickey Morrison's new brew. 'Twas last night, and the memory is strong upon me yet."

"Good Lord!" ejaculated Mr. Drew, who had a taste in brews.

"What does he call it, Joe?" Mr. Grant was also interested.

"He calls it," Mr. Link replied, with the solemnity befitting the birth of a new drink in a weary world, "he calls it, Mr. Grant, the 'Feather Flip.' Ask me no more, sir. 'Tis all I know, except the taste. With two of them ye haven't an enemy on earth! And it's harmless as the dew of heaven, Mickey says—if ye stop this side of four."

Dorothy laid her hand on Joe's arm. The big man thought a dove had alighted on it.

"You will bring Mr. Mickey Morrison to us—here—at ten o'clock tomorrow morning," she commanded him. "We want the Feather Flip, and we'll advertise it. We are going to spend on this new restaurant—how much, Mr. Carter? Advertising and everything?"

"No limit. A hundred thousand. Two. Anything you say," Charley told her.

"Whoopee!" hurrahed Mr. Ball. "Watch the *Scream!*"

"Ha!" piped Mr. Teeters. "We'll show Huncksy how we fry the fritters if he comes around. Conned us, hey? Ha, ha!"

Mr. Drew suppressed a groan. His trade did not inculcate optimism.

V

YOUR bred-in-the-bone New Yorker is a person who thinks he leads, but is usually led. He follows the crowd; he doesn't always know why or for what, but he does—as one chip in the current follows another. It was the case with Come-On Charley's Restawhyle. The stream set in that way, and every little individual canoeist paddled with might and main to keep up with his fellows.

The place was closed for a month, during which men worked night and day effecting the alterations Dorothy had planned. The week before the opening the newspapers and billboards blazed with advertisements of the new restaurant. Feather Flip, in especial, became a household word. On the elevated, in the subways and street cars, on blank walls, in ferryboats, anywhere, everywhere, the name was seen. Men grew curiosity-keen for the drink, and the press-agent work in the papers put a still sharper edge to the desire.

Charley spent sixty thousand dollars in thirty days on this advertising campaign, before and after opening. The alterations cost him ten thousand, and twenty thousand went to stock the cellars, pantries and pay back bills. When Restawhyle threw wide its doors to the public, Charley stood to the bad on his investment over two hundred thousand dollars, and it nearly put Mr. Drew in his bed. But he recovered when results began to show.

Mr. Grant gave a stag party the first night. Teddy Ball estimated eighty millions were represented at the table. They were men one knew, and it made a story.

Dorothy gave a dinner the following night. And this made another story; for

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the daughters of two hundred millions graced the board. You can get anything in the New York papers if it is flavored well with money.

People read, and came to see for themselves. They ate of dishes they had never heard of before—the great majority—and drank Mickey Morrison's Feather Flip. And Sam! He was an institution. Men swelled visibly under the benison of his attentions, and women blossomed under it—they were ravished with the place because of it.

In a week Restawhyle was the fad of the season. And it was the only place in town where you could get a Feather Flip. Men fought for the tables. It was served only there—there was no standing bar—and it cost one dollar a drink. Dorothy knew her New York.

Feather Flip came to you in a tall bohemian glass. There was a fluff of beaten egg on top—a whiff only—and what was underneath Mr. Morrison was paid a hundred a week, plus a handsome cash bonus, to keep locked within his breast—the secret of the brew. It was served to you with a pomp and circumstance that only a trained old Southern black can manage, and you drank it as a rite. Thereafter for a solid hour you were the peer of kings. It was worth the price.

AFTER the theater on a night in the fourth week of Restawhyle Miss Dorothy Grant and Mr. Carter were supping at a table in a quiet corner. Charley had reserved it in advance, for now, of a verity, the restaurant was crowded nightly.

"See who's here, Dorothy!" exclaimed Charley. It had come to that between them—given names—and quite naturally after days of close association in the work of reconstructing Paul's.

Dorothy looked around and bowed to Messrs. Drew, Link and Teddy Ball, who had come in and claimed a table near by. They returned the salute and Mr. Ball waved his hand sportively at Charley; but they did not offer to come over. There was a reason apparent, perhaps, to the most somnolent reader of these lines.

"Where is Merciful Skeeters?" inquired Dorothy. She reveled in the name.

"Give it up," said Charley. "Thought he was with them."

"You didn't answer my question," prompted Dorothy, reverting to something that had gone before. "Mickey Morrison has bought a car. He has been arrested twice for speeding. Suppose he has a smash-up? Suppose he gets himself killed?"

"Gee," said Charley. "Would put a crimp in me. Guess I'd better get that receipt."

"You'd better," urged Dorothy. "Feather Flip is a mint for Restawhyle. Just look!"

Charley did so. The tall bohemian glasses were everywhere. He leaned over to the girl, his hazel eyes glowing.

"Say, Dorothy, I owe it all to you. I was stung. No chance till you pulled me out. Shop cleared nine thousand last week. Same the week before. Six before that. Three so far this week. Half yours. Only fair. Let me——"

She stopped him, shaking her head, and smiling.

"It's absurd. I thought we had settled that. You don't know the fun I've had out of all this. Dad is proud of me. He says——"

"Proud!" broke in Charley. "I'm so proud of you, I—I——"

His voice died away. Fear gripped him. Ten—no twenty times in the last week he had been on the point of speaking out his heart; but she was so beautiful, so fine and true, and free of artifice—so straight and square in all she said and did—so sisterly—yes, that was it! That was what held his tongue. That was what he was afraid of. She might say she'd be a sister to him—girls said that, he had heard—and if she did his life was blighted. At twenty-four he would be a hopeless wreck, with nothing to look forward to but an early grave!

That was the way Charley felt—as we, you and I, good, graying reader, felt once upon a time, when the grass was greener than it is today, the flowers sweeter, and Spring still led us by the hand.

"He says, dad does," went on Miss Grant, yet not so evenly as before and with evasive eyes, "that I'd make a good business woman."

"Good!" Charley gulped in a long breath to give him voice again. "You're the finest in New York. Got them all whipped!"

"I'll think of that while I'm away,"

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Dorothy answered sweetly. "It's nice of you to say it."

"Away? Leave town?" Amazed incredulity swept Charley's face clean of other emotions.

"Next week. On the *Kelpie*. Dad's yacht. To Bermuda. For a month." She was mocking him—his way of speech—and from under lowered lids she wickedly surveyed the havoc the words wrought.

CHARLEY gazed at her dully. His world was tumbling about him. He looked away from her and around the room to see if it was not in ruins also; and as he did his eye fell on Mr. Teeters threading his way among the tables toward him. With Mr. Teeters was some one else. The sight partially restored Charley's scattered wits.

"By George!" he mumbled.

Miss Dorothy, following his gaze, had likewise perceived Mr. Teeters' companion. She saw, too, that the long, lank secretary was agitated. At the other table Mr. Drew and his friends were staring at him.

"Who is it?" asked Dorothy.

"Huncks!" said Charley.

"Oh!" cried Dorothy, delighted. "Introduce him."

Then she said, a little lower—

"I forgot to mention there's an extra room on the *Kelpie*—if you can get away, Charley."

"Watch me!"

There was no chance to say more. Mr. Teeters and Mr. Huncks had come up—but Charley's manner underwent a distinct change. He straightened up and grinned at Mr. Huncks, almost affectionately.

"Good old sport! Glad to see you," he greeted the beefy trickster. "Didn't stay long in 'Frisco?"

Mr. Huncks returned the grin.

"Saw all I wanted of it in the movies."

Charley introduced him to Dorothy. She beamed on him, for she joyed in chance adventures.

"So glad to have the pleasure," she said cordially.

"Two Feather Flips," Charley instructed the waiter.

"Say, Come-On," burst out Mr. Teeters, who had impatiently viewed these preliminaries, "Huncksy is all right. Met him coming out of the show, and we been talking. He wants to buy the place back."

Huncks looked dubiously at Dorothy.

"Talk up," Charley invited him. "Miss Grant planned all this. We're partners. Sort of," he amended, alarmed at his boldness.

"Well, it's like this," began Mr. Huncks, making no bones of his rascality. "I sold you a dead mule, I thought, but there was another kick left in him, by Jinks! I've been keeping tab on the place, and it's a winner. Let me see the books and stock, and it's a case of how much, that's all. A couple of boys with a little loose change are in with me, and we're willing to buy—at a price."

"Three hundred thousand," said Charley tersely.

"Help!" cried Mr. Huncks. Then he laughed indulgently. "Say, boy, quit your kidding. I'm talking business. Cash."

"Same here," Charley said. "Wouldn't sell, but am going away. California." He grinned and continued: "Cost me two hundred and four thousand. Cleared to date twenty-seven thousand. You'll pay a hundred thousand for the fun you had with me. More tomorrow. More next day. Take it or leave it."

The negro waiter set down before Mr. Huncks a Feather Flip. It was a ceremony, the way he did it, and it impressed the rogue he served.

"It's this stuff that put the kick in the mule," he asserted. "And —say — that sweet-potato pudding! O-oo! I've slipped in here once or twice on the quiet. Call it two hundred and fifty thousand—everything as it stands—and I'm on."

"Not the head-waiter, Sam," interjected Dorothy. "He's only loaned, you know. My father's butler."

"Oh!" said Mr. Huncks. "Well, I guess one nigger more or less won't matter. There's plenty others. What do you say, Carter—two hundred and fifty thousand?"

Charley took out his watch.

"Three hundred thousand now. Five more every minute after."

Mr. Huncks drank his Feather Flip in ten seconds. He should have sipped it, but time was money.

"It's robbery! Strong-arm work! But—" he sighed heavily—"all right. You've got the drop on me."

Dorothy gave Charley a swift glance; her eyes were dancing. Charley spoke to his secretary.

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"Mr. Drew. See him? Ask him over. Business."

"Hopping Henry!" cackled Mr. Teeters to himself as he departed on his errand. "Come-On's mighty near got his million."

"WELL, it's happened as I feared it would!"

It was the day after the sale to Huncks was consummated and the money paid. Charley was calling on the Grants. He had just come in, and it was Dorothy who spoke.

"Yes," said Charley. "Mickey's pretty well smashed up. Concussion of the brain. May die. Weeks, anyway. And he wouldn't write that receipt. Afraid some one would steal it."

"I rather fancy our friend Huncks is in a pickle," observed Mr. Grant. "I've recalled my loan of Sam—I want him on the *Kelpie*—and now he's lost the Feather Flip."

"Too bad," grinned Charley.

There was a pause. Dorothy was laughing softly.

"You did well to sell," mused the millionaire. "A restaurant is a gamble. A new man, new idea, new dish—anything—may draw the trade away overnight to another place. As with Restawhyle."

"Thought of that," Charley said. "Got my money back. Cleaned up a hundred and twenty-three thousand. Owe it all to Dorothy."

"No! Joe Link comes in," protested the girl.

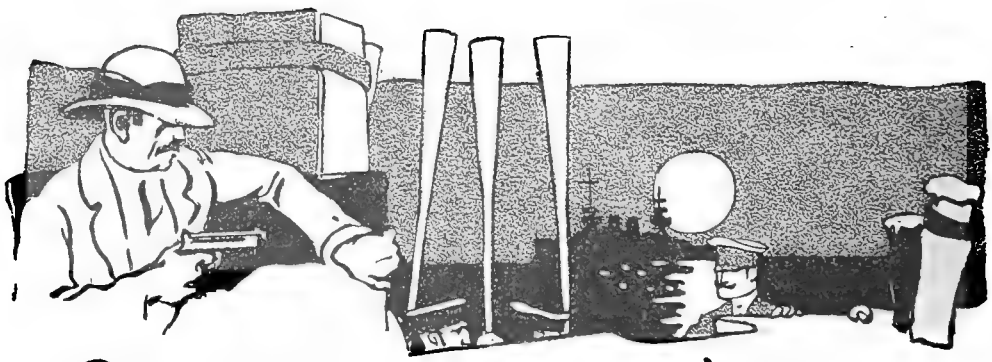
"And Joe," admitted Charley, though reluctantly. He wanted Dorothy to have all the credit. Mr. Grant regarded them amusedly.

"To my thinking you are both wrong. You owe it all to Huncks. Come now—isn't it so?"

Dorothy nodded a laughing assent. That settled it.

"Sure," said Charley.

***Come-On Charley* finally gets his million in his next adventure, complete in the April issue**



The THIRD CHANCE

By

S. B. H. Hurst

THE little tropical town was wrapped in its after-supper stillness, and the quiet was only occasionally broken by the lilt of music or woman's laughter. Between the wharf and the breakwater was anchored a solitary vessel—a Flanderian cruiser; and along the lane of moonlight that stretched from ship to shore a boat was moving rapidly. Crowded in her stern were Captain von Marheim and the majority of his officers, in full dress, on their way to a ball given by the governor in their honor.

On the landing-wharf a man crouched behind some empty cases, in an ecstasy of fear. It was a strange fear, a fear without

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tangible basis; for though one nerveless hand held a revolver, and he was waiting to shoot Captain von Marheim, he was afraid of neither the captain nor the possible consequences of his act. A congenital coward, the terror took possession of him whenever he tried to do anything out of the ordinary.

The wharf was deserted, and he knew it, yet he was careful to keep within the shadow of the cases. Now and then he looked along the lane of light at the approaching boat, and as he looked he muttered encouragement to himself, while he lived in his memory the reason of his being there.

That he was the American Consul was a part of his trouble. Born of a family of vast influence, he had been destined for the highest service of his government. But the marriage of his parents had been a loveless one; the mother had feared and detested the embraces of her husband; and the cowardice of James Clegg had been the result of that fear. Though he was no more responsible for it than he was for the size of his feet, it had made a wreck of his life. For years he concealed it with more or less success; then he married, and with the discovery that her husband was a coward his wife's love turned to contempt, and from contempt to hatred.

Then Fate sent Lieutenant von Marheim on a visit to his uncle in Washington, where Clegg held an important position. A splendid animal, without a twittering nerve in his body, Mrs. Clegg found in him what she sought in vain for in her husband. Following the scandal, the Flanderian left America, and the woman saved further complications by dying in a typhoid epidemic.

It was not only the customary sense of wounded honor that made the injured husband desire to kill. It was a deeper feeling. A sensitive man with a vivid imagination, Clegg saw every detail of the affair as if it had taken place before his eyes.

He had regarded his wife as a part of himself—a sacred part—his most intimate possession; and the remembrance that von Marheim could ravish his intimacy at will drove him mad. It was as if the lieutenant could lift the curtain of his soul whenever he wanted to. His death was all that could stop the continual desecration. Yet when Clegg found the Flanderian unarmed on the day he left Washington, and pointed a revolver at him, his congenital cowardice made a mockery of his intention.

Afraid of neither the hangman nor the prison, and with his enemy helpless, it was no sense of fair play that made him obey von Marheim's "Drop it!" His nerveless finger refused to pull the trigger, and he went away with the other's laughter ringing in his ears.

Then, to forget the agony of the memory, he took to drink, and in a year he had lost his position at the capital. His family influence was strong enough to insure his having a job, but as time went by these became less and less important.

Ten years after his wife's betrayal of his confidence he was sent to the tiny tropical town as consul, where Fate gave him the second chance, when von Marheim, promoted to captain, brought his ship there. Invited to the ball where he knew he was not wanted, and where he had no intention of going, Clegg waited to kill his enemy as he came ashore.

NEARER and nearer came the boat, and Clegg prayed to the drink he had taken for courage. Presently he could distinguish the voice of his intended victim. Then came the order "Way enough." The oars were tossed. Two of the sailors jumped out with the painters, and von Marheim stepped ashore, slightly ahead of his companions. Clegg, with the loosely held pistol describing wide arcs, summoned every atom of will he possessed to force his finger to pull the trigger.

Up the steps in easy range came von Marheim, yet there was no report. The wretched man behind the cases could have touched his enemy as he passed, but he could not fire the shot. His inheritance rendered him impotent. Afraid of nothing he could give a name to, he was simply unable to make his finger obey him; and the Captain went past unharmed and unaware of the nearness of the man whose life he had ruined.

The boat returned to the ship and the wharf became silent again. From the town came the usual sounds of the night—humanity's joy-voice; but the American Consul crouched sobbing behind the empty cases, wishing he had never been born.

He never thought of suicide—the necessity of von Marheim's death perhaps filled his mind too completely for that offer of escape to enter it.

By and by he sought solace from the bottle in his pocket; and shortly before

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forgetfulness came to him and sent him staggering to bed he remembered an old saying of his school-days: "The third chance pays for all, the third chance pays for all." This comforted him greatly. So much so that as the days went by he began to have faith in the coming of that third chance, and in his taking advantage of it when it came.

YEARS passed, and Clegg drank more than ever. At length, to get rid of him while still keeping him employed, his powerful friends had him sent to one of the Government's new wireless-stations in the Pacific. The place was a tiny tropical island, uninhabited save for himself, his "assistant" and five Kanakas. The assistant thoroughly understood the reason for his being there. Clegg was a good operator, but he was sober only about once a fortnight; and on these rare occasions he would take charge of the station, and the assistant would take the five Kanakas and go across the island to hunt.

The wireless-station was one of a chain of such, nearly all of which were islands, each separated by a thousand miles of water. To the northwest and southeast of Clegg were islands similar to his own; and the operators on these found the life rather lonely.

Even the messages they relayed were mere words, since nearly all were in code; and unless ships came within about two hundred miles they could get no word from them, because of the low power of the wireless instruments the ships carried. It was small satisfaction for an operator to be able to send over a thousand miles when he could get no reply to his sending except from an adjacent station which had no more news than he.

Clegg, however, apart from the hours when he walked with the souls of the dead, preserved in alcohol, could read nearly all the codes. He was fifty-six years old and had served the government since he left college. No man in the world knew more about international affairs, and no man was of less use to himself. But he did know codes.

ONE lovely morning he felt the need of communing with his memories, and of interviewing the world through the files of messages sent through his station; so he took a big drink and told his assistant to take the Kanakas and go hunting. The assistant went joyfully; for he knew that Clegg's word was still good—the last asset the poor devil possessed. And Clegg, turning to the recent messages, discovered that the world was in the throes of one of its war-scares; and that, as usual, the strain was most tense between the United States and Flanderia.

He laughed. There would be no war. He had seen this scare business so many times; and it never amounted to anything. The diplomats would fix things. Sometimes Clegg was inclined to believe that the diplomats arranged the war-clouds, so that they would gain credit for luring the dove of peace. There would be no war.

A message from the Secretary of the Navy to the admiral in charge of the American Eastern Fleet amused Clegg greatly. The admiral had been ordered to a secret base, and all leave had been stopped. This seemed really funny to Clegg—why did not naval secretaries hold their jobs for life, so that they could learn something?

Then Clegg found a message telling the position of two of Flanderia's battle-ships; which also gave their course and speed. To pass the time he worked out their position to noon of that day, and put a pin in the chart to mark the position he had found. Then he looked for a message telling of some American ship; for it would be poor tactics to allow two Flanderians to cruise where they would unless some American vessels were near enough to keep them out of mischief, if war were really to be declared.

As he expected, Clegg found that the *Lincoln* would be within a few miles of the two Flanderians at noon.

"Two to one," he muttered. "Well, there will be no war, though the *Lincoln* would be a match for both if there were."

He walked to the window and looked out over the sun-drenched sea. Within two hundred miles of where he stood the three battle-ships were steering a course that would bring them together in little more than an hour.

So sure was Clegg that there would be no war that he did not consider his position if there were. For the station belonged to the United States, and all orders for the *Lincoln* would be sent through him.

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THEN, as if to prove his knowledge of the workings of the world, a message came through from the northwestern station, from the Secretary of the Navy to the Admiral in command of the American Eastern Fleet, saying that there would be no war, and that all cause of disagreement had been removed; that the admiral might leave his base and give whatever leave he saw fit.

The message was not in code, and Clegg guessed as he relayed it to the southeast that the Secretary wanted the news to be in the hands of all the operators, in case of inquiry from ships in range.

He laughed as he filed the message, wondering if he should tell the *Lincoln*, and then deciding that it was not his business. He was picturing the three ships, passing about noon, without news, ready for trouble, and he was greatly amused with it when, idly turning over some recent messages to find the names of the two Flanderian ships—he found:

The Flanderian battle-ships are the *Kant* and *Goethe*, and they are in command of Admiral August von Marheim.

In the silence Clegg seemed to hear the echo of the words that whirled through his brain. Then, as he recovered from the shock, the lazy, noontime chattering of the parrots mingled with the murmur of the surf breaking on the rocks. Vaguely he passed a trembling hand across his eyes. Then he tried to smile, and the effect was painful. During the next few seconds he was probably oblivious to his surroundings.

He found himself trying to believe he had made a mistake; for the message was in code. With the certainty that he had translated it correctly, he flung himself upon the foreign navy lists; but he could find only one Admiral von Marheim in that of Flanderia. Of course he had heard of his enemy's promotion. And at noon that enemy would be less than two hundred miles away. Why noon? Oh yes, he remembered putting a pin in the chart to mark the position.

But why was he worked up about it? There was nothing he could do; and likely enough von Marheim had been even closer, without Clegg's knowing it, during the years since the episode on the wharf. Why was he bothering about him now, except that, as usual, the brute filled his sober moments? He would have been in his mind, even if there had been no message. Then, why so excited?

Like a flash it came to him—if there had been a war, his hand would have sent the *Lincoln* into action (for the American Admiral's order would have come through his station) and so by deputy he would have at last killed his enemy; since the *Lincoln* would have blown both Flanderians out of the water. That was why he was so upset.

The peace message had taken away his chance. There was no war, and as if in further mockery the operator at the southeastern station called for a confirmation of the peace message, on behalf of the Admiral.

Mechanically Clegg called the northwestern operator and obtained the confirmation; then, as he sat staring at his key, his life of ruined hopes stalked before him, and he saw that all his sufferings would have been as nothing if the message had only spelled war instead of peace. There would have been no effort required to send the news to the *Lincoln*. His cowardice would not have entered into the affair. And von Marheim would have died, and in a sense by his hand.

No more would he have been able to ravish his intimacy, for the *Lincoln* would have sunk his ship and him with it. But there was no war.

Then he found himself mouthing the message the American Admiral would have sent to the *Lincoln*. With his knowledge of the code and the Admiral's way of phrasing it, the message was a simple matter to imagine. He could see himself sending it and the *Lincoln* going into action because of it. But there was no war!

Then quite naturally, as if it were a matter of relatively little importance, he asked himself why he should not send that message. The only chance against him was the slim one of the *Lincoln's* having caught the peace message, and for that reason knowing his was a fake.

Once fired upon, von Marheim would return the fire. He would expect the *Lincoln* to have the later news, since the station belonged to America. The power of all three vessels was too weak for them to ask for confirmation of other stations. With the carelessness of an idiot playing with a loaded gun, he speculated on the effect of a fake message of war.

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With a sudden flash of comprehension, he saw that this was his third chance—the third chance that he had waited for so long. It was the proof of the old saying that had given him solace; and he thought of the faith he had so long held.

It was a curious mental picture that he made; a picture very hard to paint in words. The message in his mind was like the trigger of the revolver with which he had tried to shoot von Marheim. Could he send it?

For some time he looked at his key, and as he did so the ships faded from his mind entirely, and only his enemy occupied it. The message was there as a weapon, in place of the revolver he had failed to fire. To send that message was to kill his enemy. The matter was simple enough; for, added to the things that were, was the fact of his third chance, and the faith that that chance would "pay for all."

He *would* make good. Of the consequences of his awful act he thought not at all. They were as far from his mind as the consequences of killing von Marheim had been when he waited for him behind the empty cases on the wharf. The normal man can not imagine such a condition—a coward, careless of consequences and without moral anchorage. The only thing that troubled Clegg was whether he would be able to make his finger send the message his brain knew would result in the sinking of the Flanderian battle-ships. That was all.

Quickly he repeated the message. Then came the test. Summoning every atom of will, he flung open his key, and—he could no more call the *Lincoln* than he could pull the trigger of the revolver!

As usual, he tried to excuse his weakness. The *Lincoln* must have heard the peace message, and would know his for a fake. Besides, if the Westphalians were fired upon, they would tell the *Lincoln* that there was no war. He knew that he was wrong. He knew that both ideas were only the temporizing excuses of a coward, and he despised himself for making them. But why, oh, why could he not call the *Lincoln?*

Why did what he was about to do rise up and crush him into a trembling mass of flesh when he was not afraid of a single consequence of his act, nor did a moral feeling hold him back? It seemed ages since the third chance had presented itself. Oh, he must do it. But his finger seemed to stiffen when he tried to move it with the call.

Suddenly he saw what was the matter. He saw magnified the nerve connecting his brain with his finger; and along that nerve he saw the force moving. The nerve looked like a channel; and the force was a stream of millions of little electrons. Clearly he could see the impulse of his brain, and the electrons rushing toward the finger. But before they reached the finger with his message to it his anxiety to get them there caused them to jam in the nerve-channel, so that they never reached the finger at all and it remained idle. All he had to do was to send the force more calmly.

It was like a panic in a theater, and the electrons were the people. Their anxiety to get to the finger, because of his hasty impulse, jammed them together like people trying to get out of danger. He actually laughed with relief.

Whether he was right or not, the idea took his mind off the disquieting effort that had hitherto paralyzed him, so that without any trouble at all he called the *Lincoln*, as he desired. But as he waited for the ship to answer his weakness came over him once more, and his mind again wandered.

He began to tremble violently, and when the answer came he was sweating with the fear that he would fail. Yet he had established sufficient lack of resistance to his will, and he managed to falteringly send the message he had prepared.

To Captain Dillon, from Admiral Willis commanding Eastern Fleet: War declared by Flanderia. *Wisconsin* engaged *Kaiser* in north Atlantic. Result not known yet. You have position *Kant* and *Goethe*. Continue course and engage as soon as you sight enemy. Report progress through station X. Good luck. (Signed) WILLIS.

WHILE he waited for the Captain to translate the message, Clegg lived an eternity of agony. The fear that the *Lincoln* had heard the peace message and a hundred imagined fears tortured him. To have overcome his weakness—to have sent the message, and then have it known for a fake, seemed to him a most terrible injustice. But he was in no danger, although he was on the verge of despair when the *Lincoln* called and sent:

TO ADMIRAL WILLIS:
Position of enemy known, unless last reported course changed materially. Will engage at sight.

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Your message read to crew at quarters. Greatly honored by opportunity. You may count on us.
DILLON.

And Clegg, as the code words became plain, seemed to see that great ship; the crew howling with glee as they cleared for action, stripped to the waist, ready for what they had trained for, hoped for and almost prayed for. He knew that the odds of two to one would not trouble them for a moment; that they were only afraid the enemy would quit before giving them a scrap.

Cleared for action and silent, he could imagine the naked, glittering ship, trembling, it seemed, with eagerness; the propellers apparently entering into the spirit of the affair and working as never before. But he was trying to picture what words can not—an American battle-ship going into action.

He leaned along his table with his finger on the key of the wireless instrument, his face tense with the emotions of a murderer. His mind was kaleidoscopic with the pictures causing his emotions. Von Marheim was there, sneering at Clegg's weakness and laughing at his pain. Clegg's attitude through the years made him look as if he were on his knees to his enemy—begging him to forget. Ah, he would be dead very soon. Then he would forget.

The surety of this consummation—of his third chance paying for all—brought him a sudden and strange peace, as delightful as it was unexpected. And when the operator on the *Lincoln* began to talk unofficially, the sound of the instrument was as the music of his revenge, the dirge of his dead cowardice. He had made his finger obey him, and he knew how to do it again, if need be, at any time. For the first time since his wife's defection Clegg was happy. Then from the *Lincoln's* operator:

Square-heads' smoke in sight. Just asked who they are; can not tell from smoke; no answer yet.

Following this contradictory message, Clegg closed his eyes and again saw the ship—proudly dashing the water from her bows—at his command. He felt like a god whose touch moves mountains. Then to add to his peace of mind, he remembered the limited range of the ship's wireless—no other station could hear the *Lincoln*.

Again the *Lincoln:*

Just sent, "This is U. S. S. *Lincoln*, what are you?" No answer yet. Sub. in here says Owner says, "Those fellows never did understand what fair play meant."

Two minutes later:

Sub. says Owner getting red behind left ear. There will be trouble for some guy soon, and I'm glad it's not me but the square-heads that will get it. I know that storm signal of old, my son.

Then silence, while the ships again faded from Clegg's mind like the dim memories of a dream, and only von Marheim stood out distinctly. For years he had suffered from a disease; now he had discovered what it was, and before night he would be cured. But the operation would be a painful one, and Fate had arranged for an anesthetic, under the influence of which he was now falling.

Presently the other operator spoke again:

No answer from the enemy. Gee, but we're coming; you bet we are. Say, don't you wish you was here to see it?

Clegg flashed an affirmative, and he meant it!

Five minutes later:

It will be "fire when you're ready" pretty soon, I guess.

Two minutes:

His imperial royal muckiness ain't going to talk to the likes of us. It's them all right, but they won't say so. Now we'll start sending 'em billy dues.

One minute later:

Our bow turret just let out a bellow. Don't think we are in range yet, though. Guess the square-heads don't think we're a fish-boat, eh?

Two minutes:

Nothing from Dutchy yet. Pretty near the range now, son. Listen! Thought it was an earthquake. Must have fired all—Official, code:
To ADMIRAL WILLIS:
Spoke enemy. No answer. Fired bow turret. Enemy in range, have engaged. DILLON.

There followed a silence, and Clegg was not surprised to find himself trembling. But there was something else, something that vaguely irritated him without his knowing what it was. Was that neglected part of him that men call *soul* trying to tell him of his crime; trying to tell him that this was not a picture-show?

The silence continued, and Clegg became suddenly afraid that the *Lincoln's* wireless had broken down. Such a possibility had

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not occurred to him. Was he to be deprived of a view of his own battle? Not to know what was taking place would rob him of half the joy of killing von Marheim.

He became angry—with the futile anger of a child over a broken toy. What was wrong? Something had occurred to stop the fight. He was found out. The sweat poured from him. Crazed, he called the *Lincoln*. He waited—no answer. Then he called again and again; and then, with a suddenness that was pain:

O. K. Concussion of firing shook a plug loose, and I had no juice. Both of enemy in sight and returning our fire; but we're giving them hell. Good, eh?

Returning the fire. Clegg actually wept for joy. There was no danger now of anything going wrong. Von Marheim would die. Then the other operator began to send almost incoherently, he was becoming so excited.

Another hit. George Connors in port forward turret got 'em first. Right through smoke-stack of big fellow. Of course, I can not see from here. Sub. tells me what is going on. But you bet I can hear. It's a wonder you can not.

Clegg begged him to go on.

Coming together bows on. Expect some maneuver on, don't know what it is. Owner is pretty wise. We are firing quicker than they are, and making hits, though I can not tell just what damage yet; but we're getting 'em, we're getting 'em!

Two minutes:

Great scheme of Owner's. Got both enemy in line, so only one could fire at us. Don't see how we did it, but for a minute we poured shot into *Kant*, while *Goethe* had to keep silent. Circling around, and both enemy firing now; but we have 'em at a disadvantage. Great work!

Four minutes:

Modern scraps don't take long for effects to be noticed, sub. says. Forward skeleton mast of *Goethe* gone, and one smoke-stack. Other hole in it. *Kant* seems on fire, but not sure.

Yes, yes?

There was rather a long interval of silence, and Clegg became very uneasy. "Modern scraps don't take long for effects." It occurred to him that a sudden change in the battle might be bad for the *Lincoln*, but there had been no bad news yet. Then:

Giving 'em hell, bo.

Yes, yes, go on.

There was no answer. What was the operator doing? Was he keeping something back? Ten minutes passed without a word from the ship, and then:

They're hitting us some!

The words cleared Clegg's senses like some powerful medicine. Till then danger to the *Lincoln* had seemed only a vague possibility. That she might be hit, but not badly, he had expected. But the words meant more, and for the first time the killing of von Marheim ceased to be all. Slowly his moral sense was awakening. He was nearly at the moment of realizing what he had done.

Suddenly the instrument tapped:

Thought I was out of commission. Such a bunch of shells burst on board of us. Regular bombardment. Hope enemy is worse off. One of our after-turrets gone altogether. Boys all dead. Ted Connors, brother to George, best shot in navy, in that crew. I'm no good at telling story. Limping a bit, but still in ring. Nothing to bother about, but enemy shoots better than we expected, and there are two of them. Things happen quick. Don't seem a minute since we started.

Silence; and Clegg seeing visions that appalled him. He felt sure that the operator had not told the worst. Why did he not go on? "Limping a bit." How badly was the *Lincoln* hurt? He waited apprehensively.

His trembling hand felt numb. Why did no word come? Was it all over? The ships ceased to be the dream-ships of his heated imagination, and became real, and the men were no longer puppets but real men, capable of suffering, and with those at home who loved them.

Clegg could see the blood in that after-turret—the blood sacrificed to his puny idea of revenge. And as he saw it, he saw what he had done. He saw himself as he really was; saw himself for worse than a coward.

"My God!" he cried as he realized.

But the worst of it all was the memory—the memory of the struggle he had had with himself, to nerve himself to send the false message.

"Oh God, stop it, stop it!" he wailed. "For His sake, stop it!"

He knew that nothing could stop it; but like a child he cried for help; although, even as the weakest or the strongest, he had turned one way in the moment his soul stood naked and alone.

Then he began to hammer the key with

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all his strength; and like the madman he was at the moment, he sent:

Stop it, stop it—there's no war, it's all wrong. There's no war.

There was no reply from the *Lincoln*.

CLEGG buried his face in his hands. Was the operator dead? He seemed to have known him for years. He must have received Clegg's last message, for the permanent antennæ must be all right. Why, then, did he not answer? Was he too disgusted to speak? Surely the *Lincoln* had not surrendered?

Clegg deliberately struck himself in the face for the treachery of the last thought. But she might have been sunk. He screamed like an animal in pain. Then feebly, like a little, sick child, he cried "Mother!"

Then the *Lincoln* called:

Sorry, had to leave key to rig antennæ—other sending shot away. Send anything while I was away?

Clegg's feelings had been those of a lost soul, wandering in the uttermost spaces, without even a friendly star in sight. The words sent by the other operator had brought him back to earth with a shock that was painful, leaving him dizzy and unable to think. Nevertheless, he did the right thing—to wonder at himself the moment afterward for having the wit to do it. He replied:

I only asked what was the matter. How's the fight?

The answer came:

Kant on fire, and ceased to fire, as the crew are busy getting it out. *Goethe* and us barking at each other at about three-mile range. I saw a lot just now when I was on deck. We have a bit of a list. Firing all the guns left to do business with. Round about dismantled turrets looks pretty awful. Made me feel a little sick. More than a hundred of us dead, I hear. Don't know how many hurt. Can not very well send complete story. Easier after the fight. But——

The silence came so suddenly that Clegg screamed again. It was as if a shell had burst around the quiet wireless-room. Then came:

Can you get me?

Very faintly.

Guess something needs fixing, then. Wait a bit.

So different from the usual full pulse of the *Lincoln's* messages had the last words been that Clegg was irresistibly reminded of a dying man who, spite of all effort, could not raise his voice above a whisper.

And now for the first time since the fight began Clegg noted the passage of time. He was surprised to discover how late it was. The messages from the *Lincoln* had been like the briefest strokes of an artist's pencil—hardly making an outline, yet enough to allow the imagination to complete the picture. But how time had flown. They had been fighting over five hours. It would soon be sunset.

It had gradually been dawning on Clegg that there would come a time when he would have to tell—when some explanation would be demanded of him. As he waited for the *Lincoln* to call, this unpleasant fact had to be literally forced out of his mind. Then he suddenly remembered that he had forgotten all about von Marheim. While the wonder of this confronted him, the *Lincoln's* operator began to talk.

Kant sunk with flags flying. *Goethe* picking up what men they can. We have both ceased firing while they're doing it. Us busy trying to fix things up aboard here.

The last words were another touch of the pencil, and the picture was a very badly damaged battle-ship belonging to the American navy. It seemed to Clegg that the damage had come all at once. Again he fought with himself to keep his thoughts from the consequences of his act—knowing that to dwell on them meant madness. *That* might come later, but now he *must* get all the *Lincoln* had to say. Clegg had grown greatly, for it was not his curiosity that prompted his decision but the need of reporting the facts to his government.

Then from the *Lincoln* came an official message. Clegg translated the code—the sound was stronger than before.

Captain Dillon dead, Lieutenant Harley now in command. Have honor to report the *Kant* sunk, many of her crew saved by *Goethe*, while we ceased firing, after discussion as to advisability. Have engaged again, firing only one thirteen-inch and two tens. Others dismantled. Believe *Goethe* in worse shape. Hope to report her surrender or destruction before night.

As the sounds ceased, Clegg became cognizant of a terrific blunder. During the entire fight he had not sent a single word

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from the Admiral of the American Fleet. What a foolish oversight! Then he almost laughed.

What did it matter? The battle had gone on all the same. Yet, with the pride of an artist in his work—the perverted pride of the criminal—he told the *Lincoln* that a stack of messages from Admiral Willis had been held at the southeastern station, on account of trouble with that station's instrument. Finally he asked if he should send them now.

Suit yourself. I can get 'em all right, I guess.

But Clegg replied:

I won't. You have enough to do, and, besides, your news is more important.

The other had seemed fagged out and indifferent, as if the strain had numbed him.

Still firing at each other, and coming closer. Every shot hitting.

The shadows had gathered around the wireless-room. In a very short time the tropic night would fall with its usual suddenness. What would happen in the dark? Clegg called the *Lincoln*, but there was no reply.

It seemed so short a time since he had sent the false message, and now the coming of darkness oppressed him terribly. There can be no doubt that he had been in a semi-delirious state all day, and now he remembered having as a boy wondered how a murderer felt. Now he knew, and his knowledge of the battle was like the murderer's guilty knowledge of where he has hidden the body of his victim. Then, because thought always follows certain lines of relation, he began to seek a way of escape.

If both the *Lincoln* and the *Goethe* sank and no man was saved, then he was saved. He could keep his mouth shut, and, unless some other ship had caught his messages or the *Lincoln's*, it would be thought the ships had started to fight without orders. Not a man must be saved from the fight, or Clegg was lost.

Suddenly he saw the meanness of his little soul. Already he had sacrificed the lives of hundreds to gratify a petty spite; and now he wanted more men to die to save his rotten reputation. With a curse, he decided.

"I'll tell all about it, anyway," he said, as usual going from one extreme to the other.

Then the coward in him showed him a vision of a gallows, with his quivering body hanging from it; and again he hesitated, and for a moment hoped that not a man would be saved.

He had laid out the copies of the different messages that had passed between himself and the *Lincoln's* operator; and to these he added a brief story which told what he had done and why he had done it. Then again he saw the vision, and he pulled some matches out of his pocket with frantic haste—as if he had very little time to burn the confession and the messages. Then he hesitated once more; and he was wondering what he should do when the *Lincoln* called.

Can't send much more. All I can do to fix things to send this. We are rather badly shot to pieces. Us and enemy firing two guns each, but only now and then. Think we have the best of it; but both of us are hanging on the ropes—and nearly out.

The silence came with its usual suddenness, and again Clegg turned to his confession. Then the idea came to wait.

IT WAS quite dark now. Clegg waited and waited, but no further word came from the *Lincoln*. He began to be afraid of another possibility—the flashes of the guns would be seen a long way in the darkness, and would be sure to bring up some vessel.

No, he thought, they would be too scared to come close. Except a possible tramp, the only ship that could be in the vicinity was the *Empress*, mail-boat. Her captain would not risk his passengers and ship by getting too close. But he might—and so Clegg went from one fear to another while he waited in the dark for news of the battle he had made.

The shadows began to bother him by taking shapes, so he turned on the desk-light which was the only one he could reach—he felt too weak to rise from his chair.

Nearly eight o'clock. The assistant would not be back until midnight. But—

We win. Enemy sank. Admiral von something dead. Saved a few. Ordered to report us in bad way. First luff too busy to send official word.

Like a voice from the night the message had come. It was ghostly, this speaking of

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an intangible personality—for this was how the operator of the *Lincoln* now appeared to Clegg. How indifferent he had seemed about the victory. Perhaps he was very tired. Perhaps he was hurt or sick. And how indifferent Clegg felt, when it meant so much to him.

He caught himself chuckling—the death of von Marheim had not affected him at all. What was the matter with him? To kill von Marheim had been the reason of the fake message; and now he felt no happiness. On the contrary, if anything he was sorry to hear his enemy was dead. What had come over him? He must be greatly changed. And then, fifteen minutes later, came a hesitating, badly sent message:

Think we are going, old man. Ordered to report little hope of saving ship, and all boats smashed. Guess it's good-by, for we have a terrible list to port.

Five minutes:

Ordered to report no hope.

Three minutes:

My unofficial opinion is that . . . . . it's . . . . . good . . night . . . . old——

The sounder trailed off into silence, and Clegg saw in his mind's vision the agitated water that marked where the *Lincoln* had sunk. Well, he was saved. No one need ever know what he had done.

The disappearance of the three warvessels would be an ocean mystery, for even if some passing ship had seen part of the fight, Clegg's share in it would not be known. All he had to do was to destroy the copies of the messages and keep his mouth shut, with the burning of his confession.

But he did not feel happy. His enemy had died, and thus the object of his crime was attained. But the death of von Marheim did not interest him. He was not happy. He could not smile at his safety, although he tried to. Then, as he raised his head, he saw the flag looming clearly and defiantly amid the shadows at the end of the room from where it hung on the wall!

Clegg's shoulders straightened. He hesitated no longer. He arranged the messages and confession, and put them where his assistant would see them as soon as he came into the room. As a last word he added that the *Lincoln* went down at the moment the last message had ceased to come. Closing his eyes for a moment, Clegg saw the picture she had made.

HE TOOK a loaded revolver out of the table-drawer. Once he looked toward the flag in the shadow; then he pressed the cold circle to his forehead, and—dropped it with astonishment.

A message? Oh, from the northwest. He had forgotten that fellow. What was it? What did he want?

That you, Clegg? Well, thought I was dead. They left me for dead, I guess, but did not damage wireless outfit. I'll relay message I was going to send when they knocked me out. It's in code, so I can not read it.

I got it.

Clegg sent the words mechanically, too dazed to think.

You couldn't have. I hid copy when I heard them coming.

Heard who?

Message——

The other began to send without answering the question.

Clegg translated as it came.

From Sec. Navy to Admiral Willis, commanding Eastern Fleet: War declared. Act as agreed upon. Look out for enemy trick. Advise *Lincoln* through station X. Believe last report of position of Flanderian fleet correct. BAYLISS.

Yes, some men from Flanderian yacht came ashore and knocked me out before I could do a thing. Did they send you some fake message?

Did they? Now Clegg knew why the fake peace message had not been in code. What a fool he had been not to see through it! Then—why, by sending the *Lincoln* into action he had saved her from an ambush. He had actually done a service to his country without knowing he was doing it. Saved the *Lincoln* from a dirty trick; a trick worthy of von Marheim. But he was dead now.

WHAT was he to do? Of course the true message must be sent to the Admiral. But he would be compelled to explain why he had sent the war message over the Admiral's signature. His position was not much altered. The intention was there. No, he would not shoot himself; but he would tell the truth. Perhaps his wrong would be considered

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balanced by his service. The sinking of the *Lincoln* had saved him, but he did not want to be saved. He would be a man and tell all.

Taking no notice of the frenzied inquiries of the man to the northwest about the fake sent by the Flanderians, Clegg calmly relayed the code message of war. He waited.

Then he began to dream, while the flag seemed to watch him from the corner like some protecting power that no enemy could destroy.

Poor old *Lincoln!* Why could she not have floated to enjoy her wonderful victory? Well, she was resting at the bottom of the ocean now, and her crew were resting with her after the fight. Good old flag; good old ship; good old navy! Clegg's lips moved in unaccustomed prayer, and he made no effort to stop the tears that fell. Then he rose from his chair and crossed the room. Then he reverently kissed the flag.

Mechanically he returned to his key and adjusted the phones over his ears. Then he suddenly flashed:

Who? Who is it—who?

We can make port all right. Fine, eh?

The message was from the *Lincoln!*

THE WANDERING SON

A Complete Novelette

By

Raymond S. Spears

CHAPTER I

HE GOES SHANTYBOATING

ARTHUR DRAKE was on the bank of the Allegheny River at Pittsburg, tramping along oblivious to the fact that his pressed trousers and yellow suitcase were in striking contrast to the shantyboat surroundings of the 'longshore harbor. But he was happy, for this was the atmosphere he wanted. He was far away from his hated home town. He smiled as he thought of the girl back there who had promised to lead this Gipsy life with him—and then proved faithless.

He came to a shantyboat, on the bow of which sat a man smoking a pipe with infinite composure.

"Howdy!" the man nodded. "Come aboard an' set. Hit's wahm, yassuh!"

Drake came aboard.

"Thank you," he remarked gratefully. "Darn the cities!"

"That's what I say. Yo'all goin' to trip the river?"

"I'd like to."

"All right; say we do?"

"Good!"

The riverman knocked the ashes from his pipe, casually stepped up the bank to the mooring stakes and cast off the line. He shoved the boat from the bank with a pole, and when the current began to carry it he sat down. Drake also sat down, and they watched Pittsburgh pass by, saw the Ohio grow and the city fade away upstream.

DAY after day the two drifted down the Ohio. At night, or when the wind blew, they tied the boat in an eddy or in a creek. The time came when Drake left off his collar and began to smoke a

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pipe. He learned to throw half-hitches, steer the shantyboat, find a landing and follow the Government lights. He learned river-towns, too. At Cairo they drifted into the Mississippi, and that night tied in Putney's Bend. They floated down past New Madrid, past Tiptonville, past Caruthersville, down the bends and reaches, with serene carelessness.

At Rosa Lee Landing a cyclone came along, swept the cabin from the hull, lost the shantyboater in the murk and left Drake floating down the river in a waterlogged hull, half-dressed, stunned, helpless, and communing with the river-death, his head beaten by rain and hail, and his face whipped by the flung crests of short, foaming waves.

He did not feel fear—the true river-lover could not feel it—but the wonder of it all appealed to him. Gray was the sky over his head, dark were the waters and sweet was the contentment in the man's heart, though his strength waned and his nerves grew dull with aches and smarts.

Soon after dawn he came down a long bend in which there lay a whole fleet of shantyboats at anchor. From one of them a skiff shot out. The oarsmen hauled him aboard and swung the hull in to the bank, where willing hands lifted the weakened man to a shantyboat bunk. For the first time in his life Drake was absolutely, utterly, helplessly tired out. While kindly hands worked over him, he went to sleep.

He slept all that day and all the next night. On the following morning he awakened, hungry as an alligator-gar. A shaggy man brought him his clothes, and when he had dressed himself a lean gray woman spread breakfast before the two men.

"Who-all mout you be?" she asked. "My lan'! W'en I seen ye r'ar up out of that hull, I thought you was a sawyer. But great guzzard my ole man seen yer eyes! Hu-ee! Whar'd the storm hit ye?"

"At Rosa Lee, in Plum Point Crossing, I think," Drake answered.

"Land a-slipsin'!" the woman exclaimed. "This yere's Fogleman's Chute. Forty-five mile in that hull! Ho, law! Ol' Mississip' treats some folks plumb proper; yassuh!"

"The storm struck us some time in the afternoon, I don't remember just when. I was much confused——"

"Say, mister," the man interrupted, "how long yo' be'n shantyboatin', huh?"

"Why—why not very long. I came down from Pittsburgh——"

"Oh, you're a sport, then?" the woman asked.

"Well—er—well, I just happened to start down the river," Drake answered, feeling a trace of antagonism in the two. "I met a riverman named Boke. We took up together——"

"Boke!" the man exclaimed. "I knowed him to Cairo. Wha is he now?"

Drake shook his head.

"I don't know," he said. "He was in the skiff when the cabin went over. I didn't see him again."

"In the middle of Plum Point Crossin'?" the man asked. "Um-m. I expaict he's daid, then. Will yo'-all leave the riveh now?"

"No-o," Drake answered slowly. "I like it, yes! I guess I'll stay on it a while."

"Hue-e!" the woman cried gleefully. "Yeah's another shantyboater growin' up. Hue-e!"

Then she added soberly:

"Yo' neveh do love the Ol' Mississip' tell she's got plumb mean sometime. They say a man likes spunky women. Hit's jes' so with the river. Say, Mister, what's your name, if 'tain't too private?"

"Arthur Drake," was the answer.

"Sho! I had a man named Drake oncet—married him to St. Joe, an' 'vorced him to Memphis for $17.50. He was an awful nice man, too; but oh, dear! When he had a dollar he wa'n't to home, an' when he didn't have it, he laid around all day. I cain't stand foh shiftlessness, can you? Now here's Mr. Jackson. Me an' him married to Reverend Mr. Halk's to Micklen las' September a year. I like him better'n any man I ever had, livin' er daid—now thar I've done hit! Burned my hot bread, an'——"

BEFORE breakfast was over, neighboring cabinboaters came in to see the man who had come down in a waterlogged hull. A man named Brate, a woman named Mrs. Phelps and a boy named Lon Ward called Mrs. Jackson "maw," and all eyed Drake with open curiosity. He told half a score of visitors the story of his trip down the Ohio and Mississippi, and described the storm in Plum Point Crossing with feeling that found echoes in the hearts of the listeners, who "knew the breed."

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"I seen twenty-eight shantyboats sunk in Helena Eddy oncet," Mrs. Jackson said. "I tell you, hit's as windy as Arkansas City Landin', an' that's sayin' some."

"Yassuh," a newcomer said softly from the gangplank, "I expaict they ain' a bend er reach from St. Paul to the Passes what ain' got hit's windy corner; yassuh!"

Silence of all the listeners indicated to Drake that the newcomer was "somebody," and he was confirmed in his belief by Mrs. Jackson's next words. She had not introduced any of the others to Drake, but now she said:

"This lady is Miss Sue Cairn, Mr., Mr. —oh, yes, Mr. Drake! She keeps the whisky-boat to this landin', yasseh!"

Drake arose to his feet, and found himself face to face with a dark-eyed, dark-complexioned girl who faced him with smiling composure.

"I'm glad to meet yo', Mr. Drake," she said softly. "I shore 'lowed yo' was sutt'inly a strange tripper, comin' down into a waterlogged hull! Ho, law! An' they say yo' come cl'ar from Plum Point? U-e-e! Wish I'd be'n into hit with yo'! But them as wants to do things like that, 'peahs like they neveh can, no suh!"

"Well," Drake answered, puzzled by the girl's curious longing for adventure, "I didn't hunt for trouble, but I'm not sorry now."

"I shore like excitement!" the girl answered. "Neveh had too much. Um-m. Naow theh's some darkies wants whisky. Well, good mohnin'. Come up to my boat —the big green one. Good day, suh!"

She turned, strolled up the gangplank, along the bank and aboard her own boat, where three negroes stood aside from the door, and waited hat in hand to follow her within.

"Big Sue's real polite this mohnin'," Mr. Jackson ventured to remark, and Drake turned from the window to find all the cabinboaters eying him with twinkling eyes.

"You say she sells whisky?" Drake asked slowly of Mrs. Jackson.

"Yasseh, she's the on'y lady below Cairo sells it, too. My, but she does make money! I expaict she's traded $200 worth here the las' week."

"I know—but——" Drake began, stopping confused.

"I tell you Mr. Man, they ain' nobody goes foolin' around her, no seh! Didje see them colored folks? They's scairter of her than they is of no man on the river. Hue-e! An' a white man—lan' a-lawin'!"

The woman stopped, as if she had said all there was to say, but over in one corner a tawny youth asked—

"Where was it she killed them last bad colored fellers?"

"Yo' mean them up White Riveh?" somebody asked.

"No; them down to'd Helena, or Old Town Bend——"

"I disremember now," Mrs. Jackson said. "But she's awful keerless an' mussy with her gun. I expaict she's took quite a shine to yo', Mr. Drake. I never seen her so smilin' to'd a man befoh, but yo' don' want to make no mistake. Um-m. The las' man done that died. I don' b'lieve she ever had but one husband—neveh hearn of no moh. I think that's funny, don' you, Mister Drake?

"Well, I declare, yeah comes Big Sue ag'in! I bet she'll marry you, Mr. Drake. Hue-e! She shore said you was good-lookin' yistehd'y when she come in—flew up like a cat at a dog when I 'lowed to wake you up to interduce you-all. Said I mustn't disturb yo'! Hue-e!"

Sure enough, Big Sue was coming down the bank again, swinging her arms—a very good-looking girl, who could bear the sunshine. As she came Drake felt his cheeks grow warm, and the onlookers exchanged significant glances as they saw him blush.

CHAPTER II

HE GETS A JOB

THE vicinity of Centennial Island, Fogleman Chute, and Beef Island is a favorite among River people. Memphis is only a few miles away, fishing and hunting are good, and if one keeps his eyes open he can pick up enough drift-logs to keep a supply of table money on hand.

Here honest river-fishermen and thieving river-rats congregate as the Winter season begins, having dropped down from St. Louis, Evansville, Cincinnati and other upstream starting-points for river-trippers.

Drake found himself a riverman among river people. They had picked him up out of the current, brought him through the weakness incident to a long night of exposure and were ready to keep him till he could get on his feet again. Mrs. Jackson wanted

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to buy the hull in which he had floated, but he was the son of an able business man, so he waited till he found just what he could do, and what he must do.

The shotgun, stove, cooking utensils, ax, ropes and anchor of the wrecked cabinboat were all saved by the men who rescued him. These with the hull were assets with which he might begin river life on his own hook, for he had learned much as the unfortunate Boke's companion. He found that he had some money left—$4.38, as he counted. It seemed a very small sum on which to live, but Drake knew from talk that he heard about him that it was a whole lot better than nothing.

"Hit's a good gun," one said of the weapon. Another offered $5 for the stove. A third said that the hull was sound and it would carry a "rag house tell you-all can put up a cabin."

"I've got to get money," Drake said to himself. "I can't live without it."

He set about learning how his neighbors got their money, and he was surprised at the variety of occupations. The only wage-earners were several who picked cotton in near-by fields. All the others were catchers of drift, fishermen, trappers of fur, traders, showboat people, or gamblers. He turned naturally to the trading, and found that one could market anything from bottles picked up on sand-bars to jewelry and pictures. But to be a trader, one must have a shantyboat, or at least a skiff, and something to sell.

"It takes a hundred dollars to start a man on the river," Mrs. Jackson told him.

Drake was not now a man to wait for something to turn up. As soon as he felt his strength and recognized his poverty, he started for the first job open to him—cotton-picking. On the night of the first day he had a first-class backache, and $1.17 due him. He did better the next day. That night he went with Mr. Jackson and two other shantyboaters to Miss Sue Cairn's whisky boat. With the memory of Ohio River experiences still vivid in his mind, he asked for "something soft, please," at which Big Sue cast a sharp glance toward him.

"You-all ain' a drinkin' man?" she murmured, as she opened a lemon sour. "Or are you jes restin' yo'se'f?"

"When I don't trouble liquor, it doesn't trouble me," Drake answered, and Big Sue turned to another customer without comment.

A little later, when some shanty-boaters sat down at a little table and began to play poker, Drake once more drew the woman's attention by saying he didn't know how to play the game. She noticed one other thing, too, about which she made no comment.

"Are yo' a No'the'ner?" she asked him during an interval of slack trade. He told her he was from the Mohawk Valley.

"I see yo' workin' pickin' cotton," she said. "Lose all yo' had when the bo't got tore up?"

"I lost some clothes, that's all," he told her. "And they weren't any account to me—store clothes."

"Collars, an' ties, an' such-like?" she queried, with the first twinkle Drake had seen in her eyes. "No 'count to shanty-boaters!"

On Saturday afternoon, Drake drew his pay for picking—$9.65. It was the first time he had ever worked by the piece, or for wages. In his father's mills he was a "salaried man."

SUNDAY was the whisky boat's busy day. Early that morning Big Sue came down to Jackson's boat and asked Drake if he wouldn't take a job for the day.

"Hit's mor'n I can do," she told him. "If yo' could come he'p 'round the boat, hit'd be easier than cotton-pickin', an' moh prof'table, yassuh. I can give yo' $2 today, anyhow."

Drake hesitated. Horror of saloons had been bred in him, and even when he had thrown his past to the winds, while on his trip with Boke, he recalled now that every time he had entered a saloon he felt a touch of bravado.

"I might's well," he thought to himself, and then he said aloud—

"All right, Miss Cairn, I'd rather work for you than for a cotton-field driver!"

She laughed.

"I 'lowed yo' would, yassuh!"

On her boat ten minutes later, Miss Cairn was explaining to him his duties.

"Yeah's a gun," she said first of all, pointing under the bar to a big revolver. "Sometimes a man gets bad an' yo' have to show him his place. An' yeah's the white men's glasses, an' their bottles, an' yeah's for the

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blacks. If they's many abo'd, the white men have this side the bar, as far as this strip. Hit saves trouble. Hyar's soft drinks—but of co'rse, I'm yeah all the while —an'—um-m. Hyar comes some customers. I'll watch yo' serve 'em!"

Drake, who had served lemonade at church socials, now handed up beer and whisky and drew in the silver with an odd feeling of doubt and boyish delight. He felt that he was bad enough for anything now—he had been both sides the bar at last.

"I 'low yo' neveh did tend bar befo', did yo'?" she asked him when she had opportunity. "Yo' do'n' hit slick, yassuh! But —um-m—I 'lowed sody water was moh like than whisky to yo', eh?"

Drake laughed.

"I always helped serve drinks when our church gave fairs," he said, and then began to wash the glasses.

All day long Drake worked steadily. Besides waiting on customers he had to renail a cleat on the landing-stage, carry a line from a loose stake to a tree, and sweep the barroom floor. At dinner-time he met Miss Cairn's mother, who eyed him sharply and did not attempt to engage him in conversation. And after dinner Drake was glad to return to the bar.

By candle-light trade had slackened, and soon after dark the barroom was empty, save for Drake and Big Sue.

"This hyar's a quiet landin' Sunday nights," she told him. "Shantyboaters mos'ly lay around home that night, an' hit's the Do-Good meetin' night, so we don' have no black people. They's some landin's that's best of all Sundays, an' some that's still an' no 'count. This yeah's right good daytimes, but mos'ly nights hit ain't, less the shantyboaters drap in. Um-m. I owe yo'-all two dollars? I should be glad if hit was more—sho! I could give yo' $10 a week an' bo'd if yo' would take hit. What do you say?"

"I might's well," Drake answered. "I sold that bull to Mrs. Jackson, and thought of going on down the river in a skiff——"

"I made my first trip down in a skiff," the woman said, "maw an' I. I made enough to go back on the steamer, buy a shantybo't, put in a bar 'an' go whisky-sellin' reg'lar. Hit's a good business if yo' ain't yo' own bestes' customer. I neveh taste hit, 'cept when I'm buyin' stock. If yo' go down with us, hit'll be a sight moh comfo'table than into a skiff an' tent. We shore need a man to he'p with the sweeps."

She showed the palms of her hands, hardened by contact with the wooden handles.

"I'll go," Drake said definitely. "I don't know as I can help much, but I can try what I can do."

"I'm obliged to yo'," she answered. "Tomorrow come abo'd with whatever yo' have. I'm 'most out of liquor, an' got to go to Memphis for some moh this week. I shore hated to leave maw alone, an' I couldn't send for anything. Maw's took quite a shine to yo'. Hue-e! She says yo' eat just like yo' mout of be'n a gentleman some time, yassuh!

"She's be'n plumb sot against bartenders, 'ca'se they're mos'ly no 'count. The las' time I tried one, he got to drinkin' an' I had to throw him off the stern into the riveh, yassuh. But I 'lowed the minute I seen yo' that day yo' had the makin' of a good bartender, yassuh. I knowed yo' didn't drink, an' yo' ain't impedent, an' yo's steady an' hones'. Good-night, suh. I'm shore proud yo' 'lowed to he'p me, yassuh!"

Drake walked the gangplank and went slowly down the bank to pass one more night on the Jackson boat. Then he caught his breath, for across the gulf had come a sharp, clear memory of the kind of girls he had always known.

CHAPTER III

HE ADDS TO HIS KNOWLEDGE OF WOMEN

DRAKE was not usually much given to introspection, but he stopped at the brink of the river-bank to gaze across the wide surface before going aboard the Jackson boat. Thought of the home girls—sweet, gentle, innocent and gay—came like a blow in the face. What a contrast there was between "Big Sue" Cairn, the "lady whisky-seller," and even that Lottie Dremble who had played with his heart! "Big Sue" was dark, pretty and graceful. As much might have been said of Lottie.

There the resemblance ceased. Lottie's face was aquiver with playful fancies, teasing smiles and, beneath the surface, a heart that could not quite comprehend the hurts which she inflicted. But "Big Sue" was grim and business-like. What she had in mind none but herself knew. Coquettish she had never been.

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On all the river there was not another woman who had faced with equal composure so difficult a problem. With a mother and herself to support, she had gone about it grimly. Whatever else happened, she was not a woman to give more than she received, and this is the worst that can be said of a woman. A whisky-boat promised more money than anything else, so she sold whisky.

Drake recognized some of these things, and they made a painful impression on him. It hurt to see the same expression on a woman's face that he had seen on the faces of many business men who came to his father's mills intent on getting the best bargain—and nothing more. He wondered what kind of a woman Sue Cairn would have been if she had had different opportunities. Then he wondered why she had selected him from among the scores of rivermen she knew to help her run the whisky-boat.

"She thinks she can use me," he decided, "and I guess bartending is as good a way for me to earn money as any. She ain't a girl I'd want to fall in love with me. Throws men overboard—woosh!"

IN THE morning Drake moved his shotgun and his extra pair of socks up to the *Fire-Water*—which was the name of the whisky-boat—and became bartender and boatman under Captain Sue. What little uneasiness he felt in his new situation soon wore off. A few days later the *Fire-Water* dropped down to Memphis, took aboard a barrel, some cases and kegs, and then floated on downstream.

Below President's Island the boat was run into a little eddy and tied to the bank. Big Sue started across the bottoms at once, and when she returned an hour later she was followed by some field-hands, to whom she and Drake sold several jugs. As soon as the negroes were ashore, though it was nearly dark, she told Drake to cast off, and the boat dropped down the River several miles, tying in again under a Government light.

"That's a mean landin' back yeah," she said at the supper-table. "Theh's lots of money, lots of thirsty folks, but theh's mean men waitin' to shoot a shantyboat up. If I could lay there a week I'd make $300. Um-m. Las' trip I sol' sixteen gallon theh. Hue-e! The white folks neveh knowed hit tell the darkies took to mussin'. I yearn some got killed. One of them this time limped. Said my whisky did hit. Yo' yearn 'm, Mr. Drake, huh?"

"Yes," Drake answered, "I heard him say something about it. He said he had been sick two months."

"He bought two jugs this time. Las' year he took on'y one. I 'low they'll bury 'im now," the girl added. "You'd think they'd learn better. Ho law!"

This was the first time the girl had indicated that she regarded her business as any different from, say, store-boating. Drake noticed it, and she saw something in his face that led her to remark:

"I don' b'lieve a whisky-bo'ter eveh went to heaven, do you? Ho law! Yo' said oncet yo' sold lemonade to church socials. Um-m. I s'pose yo' be'n a Sunday-school teacher, too. Did yo' teach lil' gals or boys?"

Drake opened his mouth to answer, but shut it suddenly. For the first time he was embarrassed by the girl. She saw it and laughed.

"I think I'd enjoy seein' yo' tellin' little chaps how to be good," she said. "Hit'd be'n plumb in't'restin', yassuh. I 'low yo'll take yo' same class when yo' go back, Mr. Drake?"

BIG SUE held Drake in his place as relentlessly as ever convention had held him. She jeered him for what he was, and then set him to serving whisky to the frightful creatures who shuffled down the gangplank and handed their money over the bar.

After supper Drake started as usual to go to the barroom, but Sue stopped him.

"This yeah's no landin'!" she said, "an' if 'twas, nobody'd know we uns was yeah. Sit down, Mr. Drake, an' be sociable.

"Yo' uns plumb still an' quiet, neveh talkin', neveh whistlin', neveh singin'. Hucomit yo' lef' home, eh?"

"I—I——" Drake started, flushing under the direct gaze and searching question.

"Well?"

"It was a girl!" he blurted out. "She threw me down."

"What kind of a girl?" she pursued with River-insistence.

"A—a church girl," he mumbled.

"Pretty?" she continued.

"Dark—handsome."

"For another man?" she asked.

He shook his head.

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"I s'pose she thought yo' was kind of nice an' soft an' no 'count."

"I don't know!" exclaimed the man. "Women always dangle me around just as they please."

Mrs. Cairn had left the room, and the two were alone.

"Yo' think a woman hurts a man just for fun?" she said after a time. "Um-m. Mos'ly it's just to feel sorry afterward. A woman likes to feel sorry. Did yo' know that?"

Drake laughed grimly, but made no reply. She was leaning toward him. Her eyes were hidden by shadows, but her face was smiling, her bearing was all allure. A cat could not have been more playful with its victim.

For minutes the two sat, nearly face to face and their lips only a few inches apart. Drake was in doubt, but he was not quite sophisticated enough. He did not know the woman. He suddenly leaned forward and kissed her.

"—— yo'!" the woman exclaimed, drawing a revolver from her bosom and thrusting it, muzzle first, toward Drake.

CHAPTER IV

MORE ABOUT BIG SUE

DRAKE had never faced a gun before. He had read of such a thing, however, and he knew that death, sudden and not without pain, lurked in a revolver. Yet he was not dismayed or frightened at sight of a woman, wild with anger, desperate for revenge, holding a deadly weapon aimed at his heart. He did not look at the revolver at all; he looked past the cold hand at the face above it.

Such a face one may see once in a lifetime. Most men never see the type—the set, murderous, virago face. If she had pulled the trigger, Drake would have died smiling, for the kiss had been sweet to his hungry lips. Perhaps the smile saved him.

"No man eveh done that befoh!" she whispered. "I'll kill yo'! I'll kill yo'!"

"I should like to die looking at a face like yours!" he answered quietly, and because he meant it the girl flung the revolver on the table, and began to cry in the crook of her elbow.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Cairn," Drake said gently. "I'm sor—no, I ain't! I'm glad I took it! A man can't help wanting a kiss like that! I'll go ashore, and——"

"No yo' won't, Mr. Drake," she said, raising her face. "Yo' cayn't go away now, no suh! Go away! Go to bed! But don' neveh kiss me no moh! Lord, man! I could 'a' killed yo'! I'd 'a' done hit—on'y—on'y I sell whisky an' yo' couldn't know! Go 'way now!"

Drake went to his room. The next morning the whisky-boat dropped down to Goose Lake Landing, and business began—jug, bottle and glass. Days passed without Drake's so much as looking Big Sue in the eyes. This is not to say, however, that the tingle of the stolen kiss did not tremble on his lips.

Below Friars Point the boat was landed at a logging-camp one Saturday afternoon. It was pay-day, and before midnight a hundred dollars' worth of business had been done by the bar. A hundred or more negro loggers, raftsmen, mule-drivers and sawyers welcomed the diversion with shouts and songs, but on Sunday morning trouble was at hand. Enmities, long sweat under in log-camp toil, broke loose under the influence of the liquor. Before night two men had been shot, and several were cut. One man died.

The log-camp boss came down to the boat and ordered it away from the Landing. Big Sue complied to the extent of swinging out on an anchor-line a hundred feet from the bank, where her Government marine license was good.

"Theh's lots of money yeah, an' that man don't really kyar," she told Drake.

Drake ran the "ferry," a skiff, to and fro from the bank to the boat half the night, and then the woman said:

"We'll cut loose now. Two hundred and fourteen dollars. Hue-e! This hyar's a good landin'!"

DOWN the River fifteen miles was another log-camp, and here the whisky-boat landed in at daybreak. Here, too, the loggers had some money left after the over-Sunday crap games. They slipped away from the raft, the chopping and the hauling, and the boss, riding around, found half his crew more or less disabled before noon. At dinner many of the crew were helpless, and some did not even show up at the camp. The boss rode down and looked at the boat, but did not

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go aboard. Two hours later he returned with a sheriff's posse, and the posse stormed the boat.

Drake and the two women were seized and run up the bank, where several men, guns in hand, guarded them. The others went aboard and broke the glassware, dismantled the bar, dumped the barrels and kegs overboard and wrecked the interior of the cabinboat.

"Now yo' come to co'rt!" the Sheriff said, and the trio were mounted on horses and driven along a woods-road to a little town beyond the levee. There the prisoners were taken before an old gray-beard Justice who scowled on them angrily.

"It don't do any good to fine yo'," he said to Drake, "and I'm goin' to try sending yo' to jail. Three months in the calaboose, and yo' women cl'ar out!"

Drake gasped, but made no reply. Big Sue, however, started to speak—

"If yo' Honoh would——"

"I won't, that's all theh is of it. I know yo'd pay a fine, but hit wouldn't do no good. Seven negroes killed this Wintah, an' this a dry county. Ho, law! I shore would favoh hangin', 'stid of a jailin'. Now kiss yo' man good-by, an' cl'ar out!"

"Can I talk to him a minute?" she asked.

"Go ahead. On'y don't pass 'im no guns!"

Big Sue went over to a corner of the room with Drake and whispered:

"I'm shore sorry, honey. Yeah's some money, an' when yo' get out, yo' come down——"

"What's that yo'-givin' 'im?" broke in a voice.

"Money!" the woman cried, shaking a bill before them, and then resumed her whispering.

"Yo'll come down the riveh—I'll go down slow. Yo'll yeah where I am from shantybo'ters. Hit'll be plumb lonesome without yo', honey. I'd take the blame, on'y theh's mother. Yo' don' kyar. If I thought yo' did! Yo'll shore come, now, won't you?"

"I'll drop down the river and find you," Drake answered. "I don't care; three months isn't long. But it'll be a long while to be away from—from——"

"I ain' mad no moh," the girl laughed almost tearfully. Then she kissed him suddenly, turned away and with her mother left the room without another word.

"Ho, law!" the deputy sheriff said as soon as the two were well out of the courtroom. "Big Sue ain' no humlier nor she eveh was, is she?"

Drake started, but merely answered—"Yes, she's pretty as ever."

"The las' time we catched her, the old man fined her one hundred dollars, an' said he'd jail her. I bet it cost her two hundred to let yo' go up 'stid of her, yassuh. She'd shore pay to git out of jail, yassuh!"

"So would I!" exclaimed Drake. "So she bought herself off, and me in?"

"Sh-h-h!" the deputy whispered. "I expect she's done hit more'n oncet. My lan'! But she sets the negroes r'arin' when she hits a landin'. Sells the stronges' liquor on the river. Hue-e! Up in Arkansas she took a whole posse abo'd, got 'em all drunk an' floated 'em down fifty mile an' landed em on Doodle Bar. They like to froze to death 'fore they got took off. They ain' nothin' she won't do——"

Drake chuckled:

"Oh, the boatmen laugh, the boatmen sing.
A boatman's up to anything!"

"Yassuh!" the man said. "Yeah's the jail. Um-m. Yo'll be plumb lonesome yeah, but—" he paused a moment and looked around him—"but I don' expaict hit'll be foh long. That gal 'lowed I shouldn't lay 'round yeah all night. Um-m. If yo' go away, don' tear up the jail too much—hit makes the Sheriff mad to have to keep things fixed up. Yo' see, hit's a reg'lar nuisance, white prisoners is—ain' got no cage for 'em, an' they allus breaks out, mos'ly. Good day, suh. I'll bring yo' supper to'd candle-light."

He left Drake locked in a board-sided cell, with a grated window and door.

"There!" Drake said to himself quizzically. "If only pop could see me now!"

CHAPTER V

HE LEARNS HE IS A NUISANCE

THE jail was a small building, built of up-and-down boards. It looked frail from the outside, but inside was a huge cage around which one could walk. Chilled-steel bars, a steel floor and an intricate lock held the four negroes who were within.

There were two cells built of brick. In one of these Drake was confined. The

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brick were lined with wooden ceiling, however.

A three-foot-square window, barred and glazed, gave the prisoner an outlook across the level fields to woods half a mile away. Off to the left was a cotton-gin, whirring and burring, ginning the last of the crop. It was the loneliest place Drake had ever seen. He felt the door to the cell, and a thrill of horror passed through him as he thought, "What if it should catch fire?" He turned and ran to the window and took hold of the iron to try its strength. He was suffocated, disgusted by odors, but there was no escape.

Later Drake recalled "that gal" who asked the jailer "not to lay 'round all night."

"Did she mean she would come to my rescue?" Drake asked himself, going to the window and peering out. "A crowbar would wrench these bars off in a hurry."

One of the negro prisoners began to sing after a time, and the others joined in. The tones, carrying through the night, were pleasant to the ear:

"When Ah-h went out to promenade,
Ah-h looked so fine an' gay,
Ah-h had to take the dogs along,
To keep the gals away-y."

For hours the darkies sang, and Drake listened to the music with real delight. But at last they grew quiet, leaving Drake alone with his thoughts.

Then the terrible truth of being shut in overwhelmed him and made him quiver and ache. In his misery he remembered having had the same feelings before, and it took him some time to recall the circumstances. He laughed at last—he had felt that way in the Rocky City sometimes. "After all," he thought to himself, "I might's well be here as there."

With that consoling idea he felt his way to the cot and stretched out upon it. He knew he had been asleep when he heard something at his elbow. He started up and listened. Through the darkness came a low whisper:

"ARTHUR! Arthur!"

"Yes, yes!" he answered eagerly.

"Hit's Susie — Sue Cairn! Come year to the window!"

He took the two steps to the window, reached through the square holes in the laced bars, and a strong hand seized his.

"Good girl!" he whispered. "I knew you wouldn't leave me here!"

She made no reply, but Drake could hear her breathing.

There was the sound of mortar crumbling and boards cracking as something pried at the bars.

"Theh!" the girl whispered triumphantly. "One's out hits socket!"

In five minutes Drake crept through and stood upon the ground, outdoors once more, but not quite free, for the girl's arms were around his neck. She was trembling and gasping:

"Oh, man! Man!" she whispered. "Yo'-all's a plumb nuisance!"

CHAPTER VI

GUNPLAY

BIG SUE CAIRN, holding Drake's arm tightly, guided him rapidly along a level road toward the levee. Wide fields stretched away on each side till they were lost to sight in the night gloom.

Back from the road loomed occasional clumps of trees, and nearer stood white patches in mid-field—mansion grounds and negro quarters. Soon the levee appeared, a bulwark of earth thrown up to resist the inflow of river floods.

At the top of the levee the girl stopped and took a reef in her skirts. She led the way now, and with sure feet kept to the narrow thread of hardpan, settled by footbeats. Greenbriars seized their garments, sticks swished against them, and at a fallen tree-top they found difficulty in getting around and finding the trail again. Drake struck a match, but the girl knocked the stick from his hand.

"Oe-e-e!" she said. "Don' do that!"

At last they caught sight of a light through the woods, and the girl stopped.

"Year's a Gov'ment lantern," she said. "The bo't's down yeah in an eddy. Don' yo' think I'm smaht, comin' yeah so true?"

"I never could have done it," he answered. "It must be five or six miles from—from where we started."

"All of that!" she exclaimed. "Hit's more'n ten. See! Hit's comin' day. We must light out o' this—go floatin'."

She hesitated a moment, nevertheless,

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evidently waiting for something. Suddenly she laughed gleefully.

"Hue-e!" she cried. "Yo' po'r boy! Yo're all scairt up of me!"

Then she ran along the bank, and Drake followed rapidly, regretting that he had seen too late his chance for a fourth kiss.

At the boat the girl gave a little hail which was answered by her mother, and a minute later the lines were cast off and the craft shoved from the bank. When daylight came, the cabinboat was far down the bend.

Work toward rehabilitating the cabin was already under way. The mother had apparently worked nearly all night. The floor where liquor had been spilled was scrubbed clean. Some of the broken furniture was mended, some thrown overboard. The bar was back in place, scarred and splintered, but still serviceable.

Big Sue was as cool and collected as if business were her only thoughts. Drake found himself working under her direction as if he had never caught the flavor of the full lips whose words now drove him hither and yon, swiftly and unquestioningly. She knew what she wanted, and she got it to the last hammer-blow.

When night fell they were forty miles down the river, still moving and still working. It was long after dark when the boat was brought to anchor below the mouth of White River. Not till then did Big Sue drop into a chair and utter a feminine sigh.

"Theh!" she said. "Hit's mos' done, an' I'm plumb tiahed aout. Raiders allus muss things up so. Ho, law!"

THE days that followed were perplexing ones for Drake. The girl held him remorselessly in his place as bartender. Not a smile, not a twinkle of the eye, scarcely a softening of the voice relieved the tedium of his duties. He felt as some dogs seem to feel when a master's whim drives them about without a kindly look or gesture, ill-tempered without reason.

When business began again she was as uncompromising as ever. They stood behind the bar together, grim, silent and prompt. She met the gaze of dark field-hand and old planter with equal imperturbation. Her very smile was as impassable as running ice. She could choke a man with a look.

Nor was Drake an entirely harmless-appearing man from the far side of the bar. His smile was pleasant and good-natured. The boat's customers, after a day or two, were rather glad when he was there alone to serve them. Sometimes men would come down to the boat-landing and await the disappearance of the girl before they came aboard. She noticed this, and unless there was a rush of business she retired to the interior of the boat, leaving to Drake the task of entertaining the crowd.

One night, when only half a dozen negroes were in the barroom and the threat of storm was in the air, she said to Drake:

"I'm tired. When yo' get ready, shut the do'r an' lock up an' fix things. Don' fo'get the ropes."

She slipped out of the room, and Drake faced the men. They were drinking around a little table. Leaning his elbows on the bar, Drake found himself wondering about the men.

Two were yellow, three were very dark, one was very black. The very black man had a red scar, like a third lip, along one cheek. Their eyes were shaded with brown shreds on the whites. The two yellow men were heavy-featured, ugly in spite of their lithe movements.

Soon after the girl left, one came to the bar and got whisky. Another followed. Soon the men were coming to and fro, keeping Drake busy making change and serving liquor. The whisky-bottle from which they were drinking was almost empty when Drake saw the black man turn and motion to the others, who were seated. All came to the bar and ranged themselves along it.

"W'isky, boss! W'isky!" a yellow man exclaimed.

Drake handed up the almost empty bottle, and then leaned down to fill another bottle from a faucet there.

The next instant he heard the *click-click* of cocking revolvers and turned quickly to find that two men were leaning over the bar with revolvers pointed down at him. He flung himself at them, but too late. Both revolvers went off and Drake thought his left shoulder was smashed in. The negroes fired time and again down into the fluffing cloud of smoke behind the bar, the crash of the reports making the boat shiver.

Drake, suffocating, blinded, hurt and stunned, felt along the shelf for the revolver which he remembered lay there somewhere. As his fingers closed on it, somebody leaped

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over the bar and landed on him with both feet.

Drake was crushed to the floor, but he managed to point the revolver up and pull the double-action trigger. As he fired, there came a flash and a crash above him. He saw a streak of red fire driving through the smoke. Something fell, shaking the boat, and then Drake lost consciousness, the *boom-boom-boom* of a repeating shotgun resounding in his ears.

CHAPTER VII

BIG SUE ADMITS HER LIMITATIONS

"OH, HONEY, honey!" a voice rang in Drake's ears. "Come aroun', honey! Don' lie thataway! Look up! Look up!"

From away down in the depths somewhere, Drake found himself wafting up and up like a feather in a chimney. Light began to appear, and with light came greater consciousness. Opening his eyes he saw the figure of a girl, leaning her head on her elbow, crying out the words which seemed to have awakened him. Overhead were the carlins of the cabinboat. A window, red-curtained, admitted a flood of light. An iron bed, some pretty furniture and pictures were the other contents of the room.

For some time his eyes wandered from object to object in the little cabin, but they rested at last on the shaken figure near his side. He realized that it was Miss Cairn, in a position he had never seen her in before, inimitably graceful, womanly and forlorn. Drake had never seen her so lovely. Somehow the thought of speaking did not obtrude itself. The discipline of the past few days in her service had spanned the interval that had elapsed since the crushing events of that time when men had shot him, tramped on him, beat him into insensibility. These incidents he recalled dimly, and wished he could remember what had really happened.

"If I could on'y pray!" the girl cried out suddenly. Then she straightened up and found herself gazing into the wide-open eyes of the wounded man.

"Yo're awake?" she asked. "I'm so glad!"

She dropped on her knees beside the bed and seized his hand.

"I've been asleep—how long?" he asked.

"Days an' days!" she answered. "Yo' don' feel hurt? Yo' ain' in pain—suf-rin'?"

"No-o," was the doubtful reply. "Seems like I feel weak—I——"

"Sh-h-h!" she interrupted. "Yo' mus'n' talk. Yo' be'n shot, hurt. But yo'll git well, won't yo'? Yo' won't give up? Yo'll——"

She stroked his forehead, pressing back the dark curls, then leaned forward and snatched a little kiss from his eyelid.

"Go to sleep," she whispered.

"How soon can I get up?" he asked.

"Law, law!" She laughed and cried. "We ain' thought of that. We jes be'n waitin' to know would yo' come to or die. Laws-ee, what a man!"

Soon he was asleep again. In the days that followed, his strength returned rapidly. He had been hard hit by two .45 bullets, but having passed the crisis he rapidly strode toward recovery. The girl and her mother cared for him, compelling quiet and rest when he tried to ask questions. He knew that the boat was floating on its way toward the Gulf.

"What happened? I forget," he asked, when the girl came to him one moment. "Did the darkies get anything before they went away?"

"Some did—some didn't!" she answered. "Hit done my heart good when I seen yo', hurt an' down, shootin' an' a shootin'! Yassuh! Now yeah's that triflin' chute. I don' know whether to cut through hit or go 'round hit."

She left him, and did not return till the boat was tied in below the chute of Islands 80-81.

"We'll lay yeah a few days," she said. "Theh's good shooting yeah, an' I 'low to kill some ducks an' maybe a goose. Yo'-all a spo't? Yo'-all shoot any game back No'th?"

"I'm no hunter," he told her. "I used to shoot at the gun-club picnics some—clay pigeons, that's all."

"We'll sit on the bow this evenin'. The ducks fly low over the willers," she said. "I got a faithful ol' shotgun, yassuh!"

HALF an hour before dusk they sat on the bow of the boat, and Drake watched the girl shoot at mallards and teal which came to the little lake behind the bar. Flying low, speeding like bullets, with whistling pinions and

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drawling quacks, the birds came in singles, doubles and by the dozen.

From those that came closest the girl picked bird after bird, missing not more than one in two, and sometimes making doubles. The birds fell on the sand, throwing up little puffs of dust where they landed. When it became too dark to shoot she went out and picked up nineteen birds, which she lugged back to the boat.

An hour later the trio sat down to a table on which a heap of fried ducks, bowls of brown gravy and plates of hot bread were the principal viands.

"Yo' can eat now," the mother told Drake. "The doctor 'lowed yo' could, an' Sue wanted ducks. She's powerful fond of ducks herse'f. I am too, but not like she is."

Nothing was said of business. Drake knew that no liquor had been sold for days; at least no customers had appeared on the bank. He wondered about it, but held his peace. The two women talked to him about the Mohawk Valley, asking him questions about the lay of the land—if it had mountains, if the soil was rich, if the people had lots of money? He told them what he could. Once the mother said to him—

"I expect yo'uns people has money?"

"One branch of the family has," he answered equivocally. Then still more misleadingly he added, "My people work in mills mostly."

A shade of disappointment passed over the woman's face. Seeing this, the girl laughed outright—the first loud laugh Drake had heard from her lips.

"Ho, law!" she cried with disconcerting directness. "Maw's always expecting some rich feller in disguise to come along an' marry her or me. Hue-e!"

Drake blushed as he joined the laugh, while the mother said with a toss of her head—

"We don't have to marry rich, no seh!"

It was the girl's turn to flush up, and she did, casting a warning glance at the mother, who subsided. Drake had evidently won her regard. The mother had long since noted that "he don't act like any common riveh-rat, no seh!" The girl was now friendly in her bearing, but no more.

Drake, weak and sore, remained quiet as the quickest way toward strength and health. He noticed after a time that the girl sometimes disappeared for hours at a stretch, especially when they were in a lonesome bend or tied against a sandbar. He saw her rowing away one day, and saw that she carried several jugs in the skiff. The jugs were missing when she returned.

"Can't I help you somehow?" he said after a time. "Seems as if I'm strong enough to do something. What can I do? I've been idle for weeks. You've boarded me, paid doctor bills, everything. I've got to do something to pay it up!"

"Yo' don't owe me nothin'," she answered quickly. "Saloon-keepers always pays the bills when their—their——"

"Bartenders get shot up?" he finished for her.

"Yessuh!" she assented. "I sho'd like to have yo' he'p me some more. I've sold out all my stock, an' this ain' a whisky-bo't no more. The las' went today. I—I——"

"Oh-h!" Drake said. "Then you don't need me any more. Of course you don't. I'll go——"

"No—hit ain't that, Mister Drake," she said, her old distant bearing coming back. "Yo' used to teach Sunday-school? I 'lowed maybe yo'd he'p me with—with learning. Yo' see, I neveh had no schoolin' —I 'lowed yo'—I 'lowed you'd learn me!"

"I don't know. I've forgotten my books," he said dubiously. "I never—I don't see——"

"Books don't cost much!" she said. "I got a whole box full I bo't to Helena. I—I dasn't ask yo' befoh!"

CHAPTER VIII

SCHOOLING, LOVE, AND—A CRASH!

SURE enough, Big Sue Cairn had purchased a box of school-books—geographies, histories, arithmetics, readers, spellers, and even algebras and geometries. She heaped them upon the dining-room table and stepped back while Drake looked from books to the girl and back to the books again. She saw his perplexity.

"Theh's right smaht of books theh," she admitted. "I can read an' write some, but I'm a sight betteh judge of whisky than learnin'. I 'lowed I'd need 'em all, so I tol' the Helena storeman I wanted one of each kin', an' some writin' books."

She hesitated a minute, then began again; her voice becoming incisive, as if she were bargaining with a shantyboater over a jug.

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"Of co'rse I'll pay yo'. Yassuh!" she said sharply as Drake objected. "Yassuh! This yeah's work, jes like bartendin'—no moh! I'll pay yo' ten dollars a week an' bo'd jes' the same."

"You could get a regular school-teacher for that," Drake said. "She'd know better——"

"Well," the girl hesitated, "I—I—then I'll give ye five dollars a week jes' to kind of start me, tell I—tell I can set myself right an' know what I want to get.

Day after day the girl pressed forward with her self-appointed task. Then one morning she announced that they must drop down to Vicksburg.

"We got to make betteh time now," she said. "If we don't, mosquitoes an'—and—" she corrected herself with emphasis—"hot weather'll get us shorely!"

IT WAS a dull day, with a chill in the air and shreds of fog drifting along the river surface in thin low banks. The boat floated in mid-current on a falling river. While it floated the mother sat at a window keeping lookout, and the other two sat in what had been the bar-room, poring over their books. It is easy to teach a willing pupil.

After a time the mother put on a rain-coat and climbed to the roof of the cabin. For a time the girl applied herself steadily. Suddenly the girl turned from her pencil and paper and glanced out the window, where she saw the top of a layer of fog rising higher and higher down the river, till the crest of the wave was above the tree-tops a mile away. She looked at it unwinkingly, apparently not noticing that this was a dense bank of mist, in which the cabinboat would soon bury itself.

When she had sat thus for many minutes, she turned and looked at Drake who was waiting patiently by her side. His glance met hers, and for a time they gazed into each other's eyes.

Drake could see her eyes plainly, and the expression in them belied the calm repose of her features. They were deep eyes, full of playing fires, and softening moment by moment. Drake found his breathing growing audible and observed, without letting his gaze fall, that the girl's rounded bosom was rising and falling more rapidly.

She was fighting herself, but without avail. He was too near her; too strong. She flushed, leaned forward eagerly, seeking the kiss she craved. Very gently, with rare consideration, Drake merely kissed her forehead. At that she dropped her head on the table.

"You're good! You are good!" she whispered.

They heard Mrs. Cairn walking back and forth on the roof, evidently keeping sharp lookout, and trying to keep warm in the chill air. Minutes passed. Still the two sat side by side, their hands just touching.

There was something pathetic in the helplessness of the girl who was usually so stalwart and strong. He was more than "master" now; he was "boss"—a kind and considerate boss. In no other way could he have won her heart so completely.

Now he leaned toward her, words springing toward his lips, ready to give her the full love of a man. Then from the roof of the cabin came a wild cry.

"Oh, Lawd! A tow! A tow! He'p! He'p!"

Instantly the girl sprang to her feet, alert, self-possessed and resourceful.

"A bo't's comin'. I yearn hit now!" she exclaimed. "The roof! Quick!"

She sprang toward the door, and Drake, not being enough of a river-man to realize what was at hand, hesitated the fraction of a second; then he jumped after her. But the door had swung shut behind the girl, and he lost a second or more in opening it. As he reached the bow deck, the girl had just climbed to the roof of the cabinboat, and he saw downstream the thing that had caused the woman's scream.

Down the current in the fog was the front of a great tow of barges, dark, and coming closer and closer, as fast as a man could run. In a moment Drake could see the water sucking down under the overhanging bows, and the next instant the mass was upon the cabinboat. Somebody on the tow shouted:

"Jump! Jump, ladies!"

Out of the corner of his eyes he caught sight of the women on the roof, and heard one cry out:

"I can't! I can't!"

"Quick! Now!"

"But ——"

"Jump!" came the last desparate shout.

There was a crash, a double scream, and Drake was thrown head first into the river as the cabinboat was crushed.

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CHAPTER IX

HE TAKES A SWIM

AS HE went down, Drake caught a full breath. Knowing that he had only one hope of life, he caught the down stroke with both arms and hands, diving deep, and carried deeper by the down rush of the water under the sloping bow of the barge.

He remembered, in that instant, the tows that he had seen going up and down the river—vast acreages of craft, driven by monster sternwheel towboats—the *Sprague*, the *Boaz*, the *Weyerhäuser*. Away down under the surface he could feel the pounding of the great paddle-wheel. To come up under that thing was death, so he swam deeper. Suddenly his head bumped into a sandbar—sand on the river-bottom—and he found himself rushed along this sand, dragged by the current.

It seemed to him as if he had been swimming for hours—and then in his throat he felt his breath going and he knew that out of this was coming death. Overhead were the fleet of barges and the steamer with its crashing, sucking stern-wheel. Then, as he let go with his lungs, he struggled up seeking air—seeking the surface—seeking the open. But over him came the weakness and helplessness, the dreaminess which stopped his every effort.

He could see himself turning and rolling and floating there in the mid-depths. He had a fleeting memory of hearing some one speak of a "floater"—the body of some one dead coming down the river.

"Now I am a floater," he thought to himself, as he drifted into oblivion.

THE sun was shining on his face when he came to. He thought he must be dead. In his eyes glared the bright light. But right by his side was a terrible thing with a red head and bulging eyes and foul body. It must be a demon, he thought. After all, he had not gone to Heaven, as his people had planned. It seemed useless to struggle against the demons of Hades. Yet the approach of this waddling thing with open bill was unspeakably loathsome, and Arthur Drake drew back weakly and tried to edge away from it.

At that the demon thing uttered a piping whine of disappointment and drew back hastily. This was not the orthodox way for demons to behave. Drake drew his arm across his face and toiled with his senses to recover them, trying to understand and to know what was the condition of affairs.

He managed to sit up, and when he looked around he recognized what had happened. After all he was not dead. He had been washed down the crossing in a shoaling current and rolled up on a sandbar shoal. It was a falling river. Somehow he had stopped with his face up, and when the water drew down he was left partly stranded. The water had receded.

The demon was a buzzard, one of several, gathered along the edge of the water, waiting for him to be fully exposed, buzzards not liking to get their feet wet. Besides, doubtless, they had sensed the fact that he was still alive. There were six of them. The one that had approached him was a horror of bare head and neck—the leader of the flock, perhaps.

Sitting up, Drake saw the birds walk away, and then one by one launch themselves into the air. Staggering to his feet, he looked along the sandbar. He wondered where Big Sue was. He stumbled along the water's edge and fell, rising again and running. The buzzards, which had flown away, began to circle back.

Drake thought that he was searching for miles along the sandbar, but as a matter of fact he made hardly a hundred yards. If he had not interfered with a goose-hunter's blind he might have fallen and died the second time, and not disappointed those horrible Mississippi sandbar-buzzards after all.

JIM BAGAR saw the man in distress, and as there was no flight of geese and as the man was coming down toward the point where the geese stopped to rest, he circled around out of his blind and went to head the river victim off, before he should man-track the sandbar and so awaken the suspicions of any flock of shrewd and observant geese.

"You all broke up?" Bagar asked, as he looked down on the helpless man, fallen flat on the sand. "I reckon you-all need a drink of liquor—you got an awful hangover! Drink this yeah!"

He held his pocket-flask for Arthur Drake to drink, but Arthur turned his head away, his training holding him back.

"But yo' need it, man!" expostulated

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Bagar. "Ain't yo' be'n on a high-lonesome?"

"No. Run down—by a tow," Drake managed to gasp.

"Sho! I 'lowed it was jes' a toot!" the man exclaimed. "I seen many a riveh-man come out on a sandbar—run down! Sho! Well, yo' jes drink this yeah!"

He forced Drake to drink, and gradually Arthur found a kind of second strength. Bagar helped him to his feet, led him across the bar two or three hundred yards and put him into the stern of a fisherman's skiff. Down the eddy, nearly a mile away, they came to a shantyboat, and there the man stripped Arthur and put him to bed.

"Yo' shore had your time of it!" Bagar exclaimed. "Who-all mout you be, strangeh?"

"My name is Drake—Arthur Drake."

"'Peahs like I hearn that name, som'ers?"

"I've been 'tending boat for Miss Cairn—Big Sue."

"Sho! That's jes' who yo' be! I hearn tell. But—but—hit waren't her boat got run down? Whar's she—Big Sue? How come hit, yo'n' Big Sue and Maw Cairn——"

"A big tow hit us—in the fog. I went down under. They were on the roof. Somebody yelled 'Jump!' The boat went to pieces——"

"Big Sue caught by a tow! That was the *Jehu* went up; I seen her. Laws-ee! Big Sue and her maw caught thataway! Sho! Hit's a mean old riveh, this Mississipp', takin' a gal like Big Sue. We better look along the sandbar—the crossin' current sets thisaway. Maybe we'll find her. I'd shore hate to know the buzzards got Big Sue. Laws-ee!"

"But I heard somebody shout, 'Jump! Jump!'" Drake exclaimed, the horror of what must have happened dawning with full force on him.

"Many's the shantyboat the tows have run down, Mr. Man, but they ain't many shantyboat-men has made the jump from the cabin to the tow-barge deck. No suh!"

WITH a groan of anguish, Arthur Drake turned his face to the cabin wall, and the shantyboater walked back into the other cabin, ostensibly to make a fire and get dinner, but really to leave the man alone with his grief. They understand such things, the real river-men do. They do not intrude. Besides, Jim Bagar had known Big Sue. On three thousand miles of river, there would be grief and regret that she had perished.

Worn out, all but vulture-food, Drake stared at the ceiling. Big Sue dead? He covered his eyes with his hands to kill that thought.

Then his mind returned to the other girl who had led him to suggest—perhaps only permitted him to suggest—that they go gipsying. What a pretty girl she had seemed! What a roguish, twinkling, bright little body. And she had assented with apparent joyousness. Then she failed to meet him.

His cheeks grew warm, even now, at the thought of that thing, the echo of the feeling of dismay which he had suffered when he knew that she had not met him as she had agreed.

There was still a tender place in Arthur Drake's heart for that home-person back in Rocky City who had come so near eloping with him that she actually promised.

"I would like to see her again!" he thought to himself, his heart fluttering painfully as he thought of the river-girl now dead.

"*She* must be dead!" he assured himself.

So he determined to return home and see what it looked like in Rocky City. Of course he would see the girl there—that other girl whose whim had made him her victim, a wanderer down the Mississippi.

CHAPTER X

HE CONSIDERS HIS OLD LIFE

JIM BAGAR was kindlier than many another man. He wanted Arthur Drake to stay with him.

"Hit's a good boat," Bagar explained. "We got lots to eat; we got a whole steamboat load to eat if we want it. I never see the time I ain't got a bottle of good whisky on board. I make lots of money. I live good, I do. But I'm lonesome.

"Why, strangeh, you ain't no idea what kind of a feelin' a man has, seein' those buzzards swinging down out'n the sky, and settin' along a log. I'd have me a wife, but laws a kitin', you take a woman and if she's contented you ain't, and if you're contented, she ain't. Don't I know? That last wife of mine like to killed me.

"What you-all goin' back home for,

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anyhow? Hit won't be natural when you do git back. 'Sides like as not they's waitin' for you yit. If it was a woman, she's up and married before this, if it wa'n't marrying that started you off in the first place. Yassuh, that woman ain't the same no more, I tell you. I don't believe in digging up the bones, after you've buried somebody.

"I knowed you neveh started on this old riveh 'thout they was something started you. Hit were a woman, and—I don't mean nothin', strangeh; only I wish you'd stay yeah with me. I hearn tell on you."

All the urging had no effect on Drake's feelings.

"No, I just got to go back," he explained.

"You ain't never been back, then—not sincet you come away?"

"No, never."

"Well, I know hit ain't no use!" Bagar gave up at last. "Everybody goes back—once. You go back, and you'll see the difference. Then you come down Old Mississipp'. Maybe hit'll be next day, or maybe ten years. But you'll come back, once you've been a shantyboater."

DRAKE had in a money-belt all his earnings. He had enough to pay his fare home and more. A week after he had made up his mind to go back to Rocky City he climbed the gangplank of a river steamer upbound, and, sitting on the hurricane deck, he watched the banks as he came to them.

As he approached the log-camp landing where the whisky-boat had been raided, he retired to his stateroom, locked the door and skipped his dinner. Some one there might recognize him as the escaped prisoner. He wondered where he had lost his conscience in such matters.

When he was above Memphis the steamer met a little shantyboat coming down. He recognized it as Mrs. Jackson's. He was up in the bow, and standing where he could see the boat clearly. Mrs. Jackson came rushing out on the bow-deck of the shantyboat, waving her fists at the pilot of the steamer because he was passing so close to her boat. Right in the midst of her violent language and gesticulation Mrs. Jackson spied Arthur Drake.

She stopped with both hands in the air, staring at him with bulging eyes and her false teeth clenched in a wide-open mouth. With a jerk she chewed the teeth into their proper place and with a yell of "Great Guzzard!" she hailed her man from the shantyboat-cabin. Jackson appeared, rubbing his eyes, and stared at Drake.

The sag of the first bow wave made the shantyboat dip, and then the curl of it came over the low bow-deck. The jerk of the waters made the two grab for supports, but as Mrs. Jackson did so she thought of something to say. She began to yell at Drake and tell him something, but her store teeth were comparatively new, and he could not understand. But it was something about Big Sue.

"She wants to know if she's really dead," Drake muttered sadly. "She'll know soon enough!"

AT PITTSBURG he took the train for Rochester, and then changed cars for the express that would stop at Rocky City. He had not expected to find it much changed. It had not changed in the least, except that the shoddy mill had burned again, and they were building a new one in its place.

He swung down from the train. Even the people had not changed. There was the Chief of Police, looking for somebody. Drake had known him fifteen years. The glance of the Chief rested a moment on Drake, and went on as quickly. It startled Drake. Chief had always waved a hand at him before, but he did not even know him now, apparently. Chief's eyes returned uncertainly to Drake, and there was a puzzled expression on his face.

Drake grinned as he understood. He had forgotten his own corduroys, his old blue shirt, his faded coat, his heavy shoes. The blessing of ease in any kind of clothes was Drake's now.

He was comfortable and he didn't give a whoop how he looked or what other people thought.

"Hello, Chief!" he called across the gulf that separated him from the Chief and other Rocky City conditions. The call bridged the gulf and Chief came hurrying across.

"Drake! You Arthur Drake?" he demanded. "I never forgot a hobo, crook, boob or traveling man in my life, and I knew you fifteen years—and I didn't recognize you! What have you been doin' to yerself?

"Why, you weigh twenty pounds more. You stiffened up those shoulders of yours.

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You've been working!" Chief gasped with increasing amazement. "Whatcha been doing—farm-hand?"

"No; shantyboating," Drake answered, and a dozen people shook hands with him. The editor of the paper, who came down to see the trains roll in, demanded something to print about his travels.

As Drake walked up Peekskill Street he told briefly how he had gone down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers in houseboats, and how he had lost some friends in a river accident, and so he had returned home.

"How did you happen to up and start away like that?" the editor asked.

Drake looked him in the eyes, wondering. He saw only genuine curiosity in the man's eyes. There surged through Drake's mind a wave of wonderment and relief. After all, the girl had not told. What did it mean?

"I was tired of the humdrum," Drake answered simply. "I just had to go!"

DRAKE went on uptown and to his father's house. The new servant who answered the doorbell glared at him with such scorn that Arthur smiled in her face.

"Is mother in?" he asked, and the servant gasped.

Arthur pushed by her and ran upstairs to her sewing-room. Mother knew him! Father did, too, when he returned from the mill.

His room was just as he had left it, practically. When he looked in the glass he recognized his old self, except for his face, the expression of his eyes and the stalwart set of his shoulders.

Very soon the telephone bell was ringing. The fact that Art Drake was home again had been rumored around, and people just had to confirm the rumor. People in the Drake social set went straight to headquarters for information. Where had he been? Why had he gone away?

"She never told!" Arthur whispered to himself. "Never a whisper!"

Dan Oldberie called him up. Dan had been as near Drake as any of the other young men.

"I heard you were home," Dan said over the phone. "I was wondering about it——"

Thus the way was paved for Drake to go right back into his old circle. That evening he met Dan down at the Y. M. C. A., and they had a long talk. There were a number of the other fellows there. How young they seemed, how pale, how small-handed!

They listened with breathless interest while Drake gave them a carefully edited account of his adventures.

"What's a levee? What's riprap? What's a handy-line?" they interrupted.

Then they got to telling about the girls. They mentioned a score. They mentioned the girl whom he had tempted to elope with him.

"You must have known her?" Dan exclaimed. "Of course you did! Why, you went with her—took her to that dance in the opera-house! She's engaged to a fellow from New York. What's his name? Oh yes, Sannerly. He's a broker, and makes a lot of money, they say."

That night Drake went to sleep, thinking confusedly of two girls whose personalities he could not satisfactorily consider without emotion.

CHAPTER XI

BACK TO THE OL' MISSISSIPP'

ARTHUR DRAKE met his home-girl the following morning on the diagonal walk across the park. Perhaps of all his acquaintances and friends in Rocky City she had not heard that he was home.

She started at sight of him, and stopped, pale and gasping. Then she passed him, eyes ahead.

He took the hurt she inflicted as he had learned down the Mississippi to take wounds. He looked after her doubtfully. Big Sue would not have treated him so. She might have shot him down where he stood, but she would not have passed him by.

He walked on, but the shadow of her bearing had cast over the city a gloom for him. He knew now that he had come back to see her, and that having seen her, Rocky City had nothing more for him.

Without a word, without the semblance of a protest, he left the city behind and returned to Pittsburg. Twice bereaved of sweethearts he turned naturally to the river. Then he started down in a shantyboat of his own, morose and lonely.

The Ohio River seems pent in after one has known the Mississippi. It lacks the

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breadth and the surge of the depths. When Drake reached the Great Forks, however, he felt the inspiration and the awakening that come at last to the major soul that has communed with itself. He wanted to talk to somebody, and he ran into Putney's Bend, that first shantyboat landing below Cairo. Marion's gambling-boat was there, and Sebree's storeboat.

When he landed in, Marion and Sebree watched the way he ran his lines out to a snag and a stake, just so that they would know him again if they wanted to.

"Howdy," they greeted him; and Sebree asked casually, "Out the Upper River?"

"No; from Pittsburg," Drake answered, and so established himself.

"Drake's my name," he added.

"Drake—what! Arthur Drake?" the two exclaimed, looking at each other.

"Yes; I was with Big Sue's whisky-boat."

"Sho! And she's been looking for you ever since!"

"What! Big Sue alive?" Drake cried. "Where is she?"

"Theh! I knowed he didn't know she'd come through!" Marion exclaimed to Sebree, with the final closing of a River argument.

"Yassuh." Sebree nodded. "She reached the barge-deck. She never knowed you come through till Mrs. Jackson seen you going up on the *Kate*. Big Sue couldn't land in till she got to Memphis and the tow was blowed in; and theh she started down again. Laws-ee! She wanted yo' body to bury—till she found yo' was alive. I reckon she'd shore shoot you up, not findin' her; yassuh, don't you, Marion?"

"Where is she now?" Drake demanded.

"She's quit the riveh—stayin' to Memphis. Theh's a storekeeper up the bank som'ers took a shine to her. She's got a cousin theh, or som'ers."

Drake cast off, shoved out into the eddy and three days later he hit Memphis.

ALL those days and nights he paced up and down the boat and pulled at the oars. Big Sue lived, and she was his. That was the primordial fact in Arthur Drake's mind. First, a Wall Street broker had robbed him, and now some smug storekeeper was up to the same trick. He wanted to meet that man.

He ran down Ash Slough and tied in just below the mouth of Wolf River, at Memphis Sandbar—that same bar which is so exasperating to makers of harbor facilities. He tied the boat with one line, for he thought he might wish to depart in a hurry.

It was dark, but the glow from Memphis lights slightly illuminated the bar. He could hear the clang of a trolley-car up the bank beyond the Government building. He stopped on the dry mud, gathering his wits, making up his mind what to do, when he heard behind him on the river a low calling song:

"Oh come, my honey, come,
Come with me!
Oh come, my honey, come!
Down the Mississippi,
Oh come, oh come!"

He uttered an exclamation of astonished dismay. He looked. At first he could see nothing but a Government light away up Hopefield Bend, for he was blinded by the lights of Memphis.

There was an interval of silence, his mind recalling tales of men who lived on the river so long that they became queer—river hermits who mumbled and talked to themselves, and lived lives of extraordinary happiness. Then he heard the voice resume:

"I got a boat to go afloat,
Come with me!
Oh come, my honey, come!
I got a gun an' a Winter coat,
Oh come, oh come!"

Staring out across the water, Drake discovered a shantyboat coming down Wolf River into the Mississippi. There was no mistaking the voice. He cupped his hands over his mouth, and called:

"I'm a-coming, gal, yes I am,
I got some shells an' a mess o' ham,
Oh, I'm a-coming, yes I am!"

"What!" A sharp voice broke across the water from the tripper. "What—who-all are you? Who?"

"Art Drake. Who do you suppose?"

"Arthur Drake!" the voice repeated, half whispering. "You?"

"Oh, course—I'm coming right out—this is my boat——"

"You will not!" the voice answered firmly. "I'm coming in."

He heard her lean against the sweeps of the shantyboat, and heard the water coiling

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away from the blades. He saw the dark rectangle swing around till it was a square as the shantyboat headed in. It came ashore just below his own boat.

He stood to catch the line and made it fast to the stake where he had tied in.

"How come it you're here?" he demanded as if he had the right.

"Oh, I was plumb wore out bein' respectable, and I 'lowed I shore would go crazy, livin' up the bank. I jes' couldn't, so I got me a shantyboat off Bill Scarlet, and hyar I be! Whar yo' be'n, Drake?"

"Trying to be respectable, too—and I couldn't. I came back to get you—you that I thought was dead, till Sebree and Marion told me. Then I tripped into Memphis—just landed."

"What'd they tell you?"

"That some cotton broker thought he was going to marry you. I come to put a stop to that——"

"Did you, honey—did you expect you could?"

"I knew I could. Oh, I know you, girl!"

The boat made fast, he stepped quickly to her. She did not flinch.

"You don't need that shantyboat!" he continued. "Mine'll do. Hit's a fine little boat, sweetheart, pine and oak framing, white and red trimmings, and just big enough—it sure is!"

She caught her breath in one great sigh of relief; and then, fluttering in his strong arms, she listened, while he poured into her ear the cream of his sweetest thoughts—a veritable Mississippi Spring-tide of love and hope and admiration.

"Oh, honey! Yo' did really come back fo' me? Laws, I 'lowed yo'all had shore quit Old Mississipp'."

"Do you reckon I could go and leave you alive behind me?" he demanded. "I got to know Old Mississipp' when I tramped along the sandbar, trying to find you——"

"And yo' want me, honey—me?"

"I just got to have you. You understand that?"

She hesitated; and then, with a kind of gasp, half sob, half laugh, she whispered,

"I reckon so, honey, yassuh!"

"All right. We'll drop down Old Mississip'—we'll start——"

"But—but——" she protested feebly.

"You mean the parson? Oh, that's all right; we'll stop here long enough for that. Which kind do you want; Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodist——"

"Maw—Maw she was——"

"Oh, well, let's don't wait around. We'll have him, then, whichever kind you want. We got to get some extras to eat, too."

Mississippi River weddings do not wait long on engagements. The wedding was within the hour. The two rode down to the bar in a taxicab, and they tripped away down President Island chute in the dark.

It was plumb comfort, down the river. It was plumb comfort when, after a while, they bought a team of horses and joined a Gipsy train, which trekked out of the annual encampment at Cincinnati and came down the Mohawk Valley. This was long enough afterward for many things to have happened, and for hearts to be settled in their natural grooves.

The wife of a New York broker was in Rocky City when the Gipsy train came through. She smiled when she happened to meet Arthur Drake in the Park, both alone.

"Why didn't you meet me?" he exclaimed, after their first greeting.

"You ask that question!" she gasped, something of the old hurt returning for a fleeting moment. "And I waited for hours—hours—at the Busy Corner!"

"You did?" he whispered. "And I—I was at the Court-House Square!"

"Oh!" she cried, as if she felt suddenly relieved. "You did! I'm so glad—so glad! It was a mistake. Oh! And I might have been a Gipsy!"

That was all. They went their ways, but one of those hurts that last so long in human hearts had been relieved, and now that pride was appeased, each was satisfied with things as they had come to be.

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THE CAMP-FIRE

A MEETING-PLACE FOR READERS, WRITERS AND ADVENTURERS

THE proposal of a Legion of adventurers to serve the country as a unit or units in time of war is meeting with enthusiastic approval. Following are samples of the many letters that have come in:

You can count on me to lend a hand in starting the Legion. I sincerely hope that the United States may never again engage in warfare, but, it is well to remember, in the time of peace prepare for war. With thousands of ex-soldiers, marines, volunteers, cowboys and others to draw from, this body can become a real fighting force—one that can get into action without delay. I call on everybody that's willing to lend a hand, and to do so at once. New York, Boston, Chicago and other centers ought to be able to give the movement a big boost. We need to have a large reserve like foreign countries. Come on, boys, and lend a hand.—JAMES J. HENNESSEY, Malden, Massachusetts. (Formerly of the 46th Co., Coast Artillery, and Co. G, 5th Infantry, U. S. A.)

I AM very much interested in your Legion, as I have been in military service for past fifteen years as a Major Surgeon of Ohio National Guard—took the Army Medical School Course (only Ohio man who has)—was at mobilization of army at San Antonio, Texas, as medical observer for O. N. G., and have had many experiences in this line—at Dayton, O., flood, forty-five days (first and last medical officer on duty there). A medical department of the Legion would be a necessity if success is to be made of it. It means a lot of hard work, but if I do not go to the European War I will gladly take it up if you wish. Can give you as reference, Brig. Gen. W. V. MacMaken, Toledo, O.; Col. H. A. Catron, Dayton, O.; Hon. Frank Willis, M. C., Washington, D. C.; Col. W. Krautzman, Columbus, O.; Col. R. L. Hubler, Dayton, O.—T. V. D., M. D., Columbus, Ohio.

YOUR published letter of Mr. E. D. Cook hit me just behind the ear, so to speak, and I want to get in while the scheme is young, as I certainly approve of the move.

I was educated at the U. S. Naval Academy and suspended indefinitely for "hazing" just before graduating. Then shipped as an enlisted man with the rank of Electrician, 3rd Class, and was paid off Chief Electrician. I have been around this old world three times and have been employed as civil and electrical engineer on some of the largest construction jobs that have been executed in the last few years. My ordnance record is 4.5, and in addition to my naval service I have served three years in "State Militia" in the non-commissioned ranks, refusing a commission on account of the expense involved. You can list me as ready and willing at any and all times.—W. L. SIMPSON, Jacksonville, Florida.

I WISH to obtain any or all information about this Legion, as I was discharged Sept. 2, 1912. Corporal of Troop I, 13th U. S. Cavalry. Previous to that I was a Sergt. of the 25th Co., Genl. Service Inf., Ft. Slocum, N. Y. I have had charge of drilling recruits in both branches of service. There are two more men from the 13th Cavalry in this city and many other well-trained men who feel as I do about joining a volunteer outfit. Needless to say, we would all be there in case of real need. I wish to lend my assistance toward such a move as you speak of. Also to get more details.— ——— ———

I HEARTILY endorse the suggestion of E. D. Cook, this being an idea that I intended to write you and your readers on, had the recent hostilities in Mexico merged into a "man-sized" fight. Now for our official title, I think that "*The U. S. National Defense Legion*" would sound and look good. How about this? I have been an artilleryman all my life, and have served many calibers of guns from the .303 Maxim, 12 and 15 p'dr field-guns, to the 12-inch coast-defense gun. These I have manned both ashore and afloat, having served in the Rifle Brigade, the Royal Marine Artillery and the 2nd Hants Royal Garrison Artillery, being a non-commissioned officer in each corps. I saw service in the East Indies and Persian Gulf—slave-chasing, gun-running and punitive expeditions—and also in South Africa 1901-2. At present I am a corporal (1st class gunner) in the 17th Co., Coast Artillery, N. G. N. Y. and shall be pleased to enroll any Adventurer in my company who has got the time and inclination to help make the finest coast-artillery company in the State of New York and possibly in the Union.—AUGUSTINE H. THOROGOOD.

THE proposition for the organization of a regiment of troops to be composed entirely of adventurers, men who have gone through life hitting it on the rough side, cow-punchers, prospectors, beachcombers, sailors, soldiers of "mostly without the fortune," etc., is one that should appeal to all men that are qualified to become members, and as a veteran of the Boer War, the Madero Insurrection, as an Ex. A. B., South American beach-comber, Australian prospector, mule-skinner in the U. S. Q. M. D. in the Boxer trouble in China, and a few other stunts, I should be proud to be a member, ready for the call. I think your suggestion as to how the organization should be made is good. The idea has been in my mind for a long while, but in an indefinite form.—J. O. BREWSTER, Coleman, Tex.

The European War has proved conclusively that the country that has to turn

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green men into trained soldiers before it can put a real army into the field is under a terrible disadvantage. Our regular army is a joke, as to size, compared to the armies of whichever European nations emerge victorious from their great struggle—perhaps soon to cast covetous eyes on this hemisphere. The United States doesn't want war, but no one can prove that it won't have war thrust upon it. In these days careful advance preparation for war counts far more heavily than ever before in history.

The Legion would be a step in the right direction. And those who joined it would have two big advantages:

First, they would be sure of serving with other men who could handle high-power rifles, take care of themselves roughing it in the open, obey orders, and "not go up in the air when they get in a tight place," as E. D. Cook, who first proposed the Legion, puts it.

Second, being already partly trained as above, already organized and officially or semi-officially recognized by the War Department, they would get to the front long before the totally raw bulk of volunteers.

THE U. S. War College has divided the State militia of the whole country into twelve divisional districts, each containing twelve tactical divisions. They will easily fill out the infantry complement of these divisions; but cavalry, field artillery, engineers and sanitary complements will be very hard to get. There is the Legion's big chance. Enroll in companies of 100 to 150 men, some companies engineers, some cavalry, etc. During peace you would have no duties. When war breaks out offer these organized companies to the War Department, to be taken into the militia to supply the missing units in the various divisions. You would be on the firing-line long before the first company of ordinary volunteers even got started toward it, and serving with men you could depend upon.

There are thousands and thousands of you who know horses, rifles, engineering, hospital and sanitary work, machine-guns, artillery and, even more important, how to take care of yourselves in the open. A large part have served with at least one regular army or navy. There are no climates and conditions that some of you aren't thoroughly familiar with.

In addition to the company units of engineers, cavalry, artillery, etc., organize one or more infantry regiments. These probably wouldn't reach the front so quickly, but they'd have a big start on all the ordinary volunteers.

ORDINARILY, being scattered, you would have no way of getting together, but this Camp-Fire of ours removes that difficulty by giving you a "meeting-place" and a means of organizing. This magazine is to have no voice in the affairs of the Legion, but it stands ready to help in any reasonable way the Legion asks it to.

The Legion will in no way interfere with the free movements of its members in time of peace; 25 cents should cover all dues and fees; duties of officers confined to keeping roll of names and *current* addresses; members to report by mail as soon as hostilities are *probable*. The greatest care must be used to take in only the right kind of men.

UNTIL further notice, all desiring to enroll—for the twofold purpose of giving valuable help to your country in her time of need and yourself a chance at the Biggest Adventure of All—write to Dr. J. E. Hausmann, 709 W. 169th St., New York City. Dr. Hausmann has seen active service in Cuba, China and the Philippines, is enthusiastic over the big possibilities of the Legion, and seems to those I have been able to consult to be the right man to start the Legion *right*. As soon as possible the country should be divided into divisions (probably the twelve established by the War College) and a good man carefully selected to enroll for each division. Final organization and election of general officers to come later. Districts and fighting units to elect their own officers when organized.

HERE is another part of the letter from Mr. Thorogood, quoted elsewhere in reference to the Legion:

About the Jews, both in the British service and in that of the U. S., I have always dropped across a very good element, good company in the barrack-room or in the mess aboard ship, and men who in "action" or in a tight corner did their share to bear the brunt. I enclose a cutting on this which will interest some of our readers, as it appertains to the present European War:

"True to the glorious record of their famous regiment, the Black Watch showed the greatest bravery in the fight round Mons. A corporal and two privates, all wounded, who have just arrived in

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London from the front, were surrounded by a crowd of admirers and loudly cheered in Leicester Square. 'I want to let the public know how the Black Watch went through it,' said the corporal. 'In the thick of it we were singing Harry Lauder's latest. Aye, laddie, it was grand; all around us were the dead and dying, and every now and then the German shells would burst, and as we peppered away at 'em we sang about "Roamin' in the Gloamin'" and "The Lass of Killiecrankie."' Somebody asked a question about the Jews—what were they doing? A Highlander broke in sharply, 'Doin'? Well, their duty. We had three with us, and bonnier lads and braver I don't wish to see. They fought just splendid!' There was a private of the Berkshire Regiment with the Highlanders, and he also had a good word to say of the Jews at the front. 'We had ten in our company,' he remarked, 'all good fighters, and six won't be seen again. So don't say a word against the Jews!'"

PATHOS is added to your last account some months ago when "Barwick" advertised in "Lost Trails" for his three brothers, only to find that two of them were dead and that the survivor was an Inspector in the U. S. Customs Service. This gentleman lost the trail of his brother in San Francisco, but got in touch with him again after a lapse of two months. The sequel to this was a letter of invitation to the wanderer to come to New York and receive a right royal welcome, but ere he could do so his brother took sick and died two weeks later. Thus our friends, separated for over thirty-three years, got to receive a couple of letters through our "one and only" *Adventure*, but that great relentless enemy, Death, decreed they should not meet.—AUGUSTINE H. THOROGOOD.

WILLIAM MACLEOD RAINE, who wrote the complete novel in this issue, was born in London, England, in 1871, of Scotch parentage. His Summer vacations were all spent in the Burns district of Ayrshire and the Crockett country in Galloway until his father moved to America in '81. By some queer kink of chance the family settled in Arkansas instead of California, which had been the intended destination. At the age of seventeen he was sent to Oberlin College, from which he was graduated in 1894.

He went West at once to Seattle, and for several full poverty-stricken years he knocked about on ranches, taught school, and reported on the Seattle papers. He enlisted in the Washington volunteers the day after the blowing up of the *Maine*, but a physical examination showed his lungs not up to par. The regiment went to the Philippines without him, and Mr. Raine moved to the high, dry Rockies of Colorado.

He has since this time made Denver his headquarters, with occasional long wanderings in Arizona, New Mexico, California, Wyoming and other Western States, and occasional flying trips to Mexico and Canada in search of adventure on the frontiers of civilization. In the course of these he has gathered matter for his numerous short stories of the West and for his novels "Wyoming," "A Daughter of Raasay," "Mavericks," "A Daughter of the Dons," etc.

In addition to his work as a fiction writer Mr. Raine has written many articles for reviews along economic and civic lines. He was at one time the editorial writer for the *Rocky Mountain News*, at another Sunday editor of the Denver *Post*, and has served in various capacities on different papers.

HERE, again, is the brief explanation of our identification-cards. They are offered free of charge to any of you. All we ask is that you comply carefully with the simple directions as they appear below in italics:

The cards bear this inscription, printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian, and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, U. S. A., stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one friend, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. The names and addresses will be treated as confidential by us. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for purposes of business identification. Later, arrangements may perhaps be made for money deposits to cover cable or telegraph notifications. Cards furnished free of charge, *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application. Send no applications without the two names and two addresses in full.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Later, for the cost of manufacture, we may furnish, instead of the above cards, a card or tag of aluminum, proof against heat, water and general wear and tear, for adventurers when actually in the jungle, desert, etc.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give the two names and addresses in full when applying.*

RAYMOND S. SPEARS has spent a good deal of his life in the woods and on our inland waters—Lake Ontario, Canada, the Mississippi, the Ohio, the Tennessee, Chesapeake Bay and elsewhere. A son of John R. Spears, newspaper man, historian and fiction writer, he was born at Bellevue, Ohio, in 1876; moved to Silver Creek, N. Y., then New York City, then the Adirondacks. For a time he served on the New York *Sun*, later the *Herald*. Two or three years ago he rowed 350 miles in a skiff along the north shore of Lake Ontario. That's the intimate kind of trip he loves. Some of the rest he will tell you himself.

I had seen one little arm of the Mississippi, and I wanted to see more. I figured on it for months, and in the Fall of 1903 I got myself to St. Louis,

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bought a 16-foot skiff and went afloat with a camping outfit early in October. It was a very, very large river. It was like floating in the middle of a lake down reach and bend, and every day it seemed to grow larger. Ever since, I've been trying to find words to show just how everlastingly big Old Mississip' is.

FOR days I floated down the stream, just looking at it. It was so lonesome away out in the middle that I would scud along close to the bank. In Kaskaskia Cut-Off I landed in at Menard's, and found Jack Stevenson, and Jack and I dropped down the river together and helped scare each other with river rats and steamboat waves. At Tiptonville I stopped to cross to Reelfoot Lake, the New Madrid earthquake wonder. I left the river at Memphis, crossed to the St. Francis and went down that Swampland stream from Hatchie Coon to Sterling, at the mouth. I saw along this stream many things, including pearl hunters, and fugitives from justice —who went out the back door when I came in the front—and two-story houses, the upper story for residence when the Overflow afflicts the Bottoms. Also trappers, hunters, deadenings, terribly thin cattle, and hogs with the most expressive grunts you ever heard.

I REACHED Helena, Ark., with twenty-seven cents, I think. I lived with a fisherman on a shanty-boat (the River People's home; really a house-boat) till I could get some money. This, following three weeks in a shanty-boat at Memphis, enamored me of shanty-boat life. I saw that instead of a skiff I should have a shanty-boat, and from Helena to Vicksburg I lived and tripped in other men's shanty-boats. For a time I was with an electric-belt man, and then with a medicine man and a gambler, and when they split up I went with the medicine man.

I wrote notes of what I saw till my arms were tired, and I almost wore my typewriter out trying to get it all down. I was swamped with adventure and steeped in experience, so to speak. I was getting what I had never hoped for. At Vicksburg the medicine man formed a sentimental attachment, toward which pastime he was prone to drift, and I departed on a raft that contained 2,500,000 feet of lumber and was the only thing of human construction that could trip the Mississippi and not be ashamed of its pigmy proportions, barring coal-barge fleets.

Having heard much of the Chafelli, I left the tow at Red River, cut through the Mud Hole and dropped down Atchafalaya Bayou—a delta outlet of the Mississippi; saw Grande River, went through The Romp, Lake Bonaparte, Grand Lake and came out at Morgan City, La., on Berwick's Bay, after six months on the way.

I TRIED to settle down in peace and comfort, but politics seemed to offer a pleasant field for travel and adventure near home. If you will turn to the Old Guard papers in the Upper Mohawk Valley, you will find sundry references to "the wild-eyed man," the "wild insurgent," the "disturber," "the trouble-maker," etc. The sad part of it is that in politics most politicians take themselves so seriously that they miss all the fun they might have. I think the punishment meted out by an indignant Nemesis on the political scoundrel is that he shall have nothing to laugh at while he flounders in oceans of his own ridiculousness. For a year and a half I was timber-thief hunter and game-law enforcer on the Forest, Fish and Game Commission, and was fired out the month after I reported the purchase of its own lands by the State—hoolah!

JUST at present I'm plumb peaceable, trying to put into fiction some of the Eternal Truths about ambition, lack of ambition, the exquisite joy of fighting for success, and the equally painful sorrow of being satisfied with oneself as he is.

INFORMATION DIRECTORY

IMPORTANT: Only items like those below can be printed—standing sources of information. No room on this page to ask or answer specific questions. Recommend no source of information you are not *sure* of. False information may cause serious loss, even loss of life. *Adventure* does its best to make this directory reliable, but assumes no responsibility therefor.

For data on the Amazon country write Algot Lange, care Explorers' Club, 345 Amsterdam Ave., New York City. Replies only if stamped, addressed envelope is enclosed and only at Mr. Lange's discretion, this service being purely voluntary.

For the Banks fisheries, Frederick William Wallace, editor *Canadian Fisherman*, 35 St. Alexander St., Montreal. Same conditions as above.

For the Philippines and Porto Rico, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dep't, Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii and Alaska, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Ag., Com., and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

For Central and South America, John Barrett, Dir. Gen., Pan-American Union, Wash., D. C.

For R. N. W. M. P., Comptroller Royal North West Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can., or Commissioner, R. N. W. M. P., Regina, Sask. Only unmarried British subjects age 22 to 30, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs., accepted.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal, Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

For Adventurers' Club, get data from this magazine.

For the Legion, Dr. J. E. Hausmann, 709 W. 169th St., New York City, or this magazine.

CAN you add any reliable sources of adventure information? Read carefully the note marked "Important."

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN.

WANTED MEN

NOTE.—We offer this corner of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to our readers. Naturally we can not vouch for any of the letters, the writers thereof, or any of the claims set forth therein, beyond the fact that we receive and publish these letters in good faith. We reserve the privilege of not publishing any letters or parts of a letter. Any inquiry for men sent to this magazine will be considered as intended for publication, at our discretion, in this department, with all names and addresses given therein printed in full, unless such inquiry contains contrary instructions. In the latter case we reserve the right to substitute for real names any numbers or other names. We are ready to forward mail through this office, but assume no responsibility therefor. **N.B.—Items asking for money rather than men will not be published.**

YOUNG experienced bike-tourist, good rider, wants partner to join him in a daredevil act of any kind. Only men with acts need reply.—Address W. 260.

PARTNER, 35 to 40 years old, with no ties to bring him home for a year or two. Will leave in the Spring. We can kill all the game we want—deer, bear, turkey and

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quail, and better than all, will show him some of the finest mineral on the North American continent. Am not hunting for millionaire, but just a good all-around partner who can bear his part of expenses of the trip. Can give references as to square dealing, and will ask same.—Address MART BYBEE, care of Box 183, Cascade, Mont.

AN AMERICAN, 23 years of age, who has spent two years in mines, on plantations and railroad construction work in republics of Central America, would like to get into communication with some one who realizes the opportunities offered in these and South American countries in the line of adventure, etc.—Address W. 261.

GOOD, genial fellow to join me for adventure and profit. Recently received a letter from an Indian whom I did a favor. It says, "Me know where heap plenty gold. You my friend, come I show you. Me no sabe mine, me show you where deep hole gold plenty." The country is wooded, in most unexplored part of California, on headwaters of Sacramento River. Hunting and fishing in abundance. I am an assayer and a good judge of ore. Partner must pay his share of the three months' trip.—Address A. L. M., Box 23, Sierra Madre, Cal.

PARTNER for trip around world. Will make our expenses as we go. Must have enough to buy own outfit. Means of locomotion to be decided later. Am 31 years old, 5 ft. 7 in., 160 lbs. Educated. Good shot. No grumbler or boozer need apply. Must be able to rough it.—Address GEORGE PERTAIN, Co. D. 12th Inf., Nogales, Ariz.

Inquiries for opportunities instead of men are NOT printed in this department.

PARTNER or chum, 25 to 30 years of age. Intelligent, with a sense of humor, and at least a common-school education, able to keep a correct written diary of what he sees, to join me in a trip to cover the entire United States, and possibly Canada. Will work way from place to place and write our experiences with a view of having them published in some magazine. I am graduated engineer, automobile mechanic, and first-class salesman. If you answer, state what qualifications you have to earn honest money while en route.—Address H. H. HART, Overland Hotel, 31st & Prairie Ave., Chicago, Ill.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE.—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right, in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada.

DESCENDANTS of Captain William Boyd, an American officer in the English force that captured Louisburg from the French about 1750, and was last heard of as having settled near Wiscasset, Maine, shortly afterward. Any person having the name of Boyd, or information concerning the above, please write.—Address A. BOYD, care of *Adventure.*

WILL FRED MATTHEWS, movie operator and feather-weight boxer, formerly of Helena, Mont. [Last heard from Ogden, Utah. He desired to join me on a cycle trip at Northampton, Mass., last July.—Address E. J. MILLER, Marion Ave., Plantsville, Conn.

DONALD NORTH, once chief steward on the Leyland lines, *Cestrian*, *Winifredian*, and a Red Star, Antwerp, boat. Traveled to London with him several times. Last heard of him in 1904.—Address CHARLES OMAR ROGERS, 875 Washington St., Boston, Mass.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

JOSEPH McFALL (Bob Lee), formerly of Chicago. We worked together on the Waverly Ranch, Fresno, Cal., in the Summer of 1904. Went latter part of year to Portland, Ore. Separated in East Portland in October of that year. Since heard that McFall was seen in Sydney, N. S. W. He is 6 ft.; 135 lbs.; dark, almost swarthy; gray eyes, with slight cast in left one.—Address R. L. HARRIS, Box 209, Fresno, Cal.

AM A foundling or orphan. Raised by lady named Mrs. Mary Madison or Mrs. Samuel Madison. Lived Stanton, Mich., till 4 or 5 years of age. Finally moved to Chicago. Lived there till 12 years old, then she moved to Wisconsin. She refused to tell me anything, and I thought she was my mother till I was 16 years old. Then others enlightened me. She then claimed my name was Manchester. I am brunette, 5 ft. 1 in., brown eyes and hair, mole on left hip. Can't some one at least tell me who I am?—Address MRS. WILLIAM ROSS, Grand Union Hotel, St. Cloud, Minn.

JAMES DAVENPORT, last seen New Orleans, March, 1912. Native of Mississippi. Age 29; height about 5 ft. 10 in.; light hair; blue eyes. Two years with Pennsylvania Mounted Police.—Address C. BERDINE WALKER, 331 Seeley Ave., Chicago, Ill.

LEON D. SCISCO, last heard of on the United States Training-ship, *Newport*, in New York City in 1912. Worked for number of years in Lead, S. D. About 22 years of age.—Address M. JAMES GOLDSTEIN, 150 Maple St., Yonkers, N. Y.

HUGH McKENNEY, last heard of in Wenatchie, Wash., Oct. 1913. He is bronco-buster from Douglas, Ariz.—Address DON (JACK) SANDERSON, R. R. No. 4, Cuba, Mo.

EDWARD HEPPER SUTTON, of Sheffield, England, steel merchant. Last heard of in Montreal. Daughter inquires.—Address L. T. 263.

ARTHUR A. DOWST. Knew him Boston, N. Y. C., Los Angeles and Petaluma, Cal. Last heard of him in Sept. 1911, in the cider or vinegar business in Seattle or Tacoma, Wash.—Address CHARLES OMAR ROGERS, 875 Washington St., Boston, Mass.

OGDEN, known as "Tex" or "Two Bar Slim," cowpuncher, miner, radio operator, sailor, soldier of fortune. Last heard of in Culiacan, Cananea, Mexico. Old pal is worried.—Address JACK WOLFF, Rawhide, Nevada.

WILLIAM REYNOLDS, stationed at Tucuran some time during period 1902-1904 as a sergeant, F Co. 23rd Infantry.—Address L. T. 216.

EARL JENKINS, last heard of in Toronto, Canada. Was then in the moving-picture business. Would like to know his whereabouts.—Address OLIVER SAYLES, 31 Lindo Apts., corner Jones and Pine sts., San Francisco.

RICHARDE MENDOZA, last heard of as official with Argentine Consul at Ottawa. Reported to have left for South America. Information greatly appreciated.—Address F. A. M., care *Adventure.*

CHARLES LOEBER, private of the infantry on detached service as clerk at Zamboanga during 1902-1904—Address L. T. 216.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

WILLIAM COOK, private in the 3rd Squadron, 14th Cavalry stationed at Jolo, 1903 and 1904.—Address L. T. 216.

FRANK WILLIAM BRADFORD, last heard from about fourteen years ago at North Yakima, Washington.—Address C. M. BRADFORD, 2065 West 42nd St., Cleveland, Ohio.

MEMER MARSH (Lee or de Chantles), or any relative or friend. Said to be native of Poughkeepsie, N. Y. Has lived in New York, Brooklyn, and rural sections of Georgia and Texas. Last heard of in Brooklyn, 1902.—Address L. T. 259.

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S. A. GOLDSTEIN, JR., my brother; inheritance awaiting him. Age 23, 5 ft. 10 in., stooped shoulders, last heard of in Syracuse, N. Y. Information wanted.—Address NATHAN GOLDSTEIN, Box 40, Yonkers, New York.

DAVID FERDINAND GARDNER, brother, 50 years old, 5 ft. 6 in., dark complected, brown hair and eyes. Last heard of in hospital, San Francisco. Once engineer on steamer running up Yukon River. Not heard from in eight years.—Address MRS. F. P. DISNEY, 918 N. Mount St., Baltimore, Md.

HARRISON H. LEWIS, JR. Would be very glad to hear from you. Please write.—Address GEORGE A. TURNER, 97 Fort Washington Ave., New York City.

C. W. NYLANDER left Sweden 1893. Born 1876. Last heard of fourteen years ago in Cooperstown, N. D. Any one knowing whereabouts, write brother.—Address FRANZ NYLANDER, 6 Willow Court, Jersey City, N. J.

WALTER STOCKTON, served in 26th U. S. Volunteer Infantry in 1899 to 1901.—Address L. T. 216.

ARTHUR McKEEVER, middleweight wrestler. Last seen in Detroit, Mich. Any one knowing whereabouts, write.—Address OLIVER SAYLES, 3 East 85th St., New York City.

CHARLES LINDSAY, sergeant in the 10th Infantry at Tucuran, P. I., 1902 to 1904.—Address L. T. 216.

CHARLES T. WALKER, father. If you see this, please write C. BERDINE WALKER, 331 Seeley Ave., Chicago, Ill.

FRANK ALBERT TURNNARD, last seen in 1896. Was intending to depart from Illinois to Ohio.—Address L. T. 262.

JACK SNEAD, structural iron-worker. Last seen at Jim Barker's "Tropico Hotel" in Coatepeque, Guatemala, on way to Brown's construction camp on the Pan-American line, near San Mighelita, in December, 1912.—Address S. J. L., care of *Adventure*.

PAUL V. REEVES, brother. Last heard from Manila, P. I., Jan. 1900, with H. Ford, Sup't Trans.—Address MRS. J. C. SHAFFER, 519 So. Cinn, Tulsa, Okla.

JOSEPH CARHART, coxswain, U. S. N. 1902, run down by torpedo-boat Culebra Bay. With me in the San Juan Hospital.—Address V. V. BARNES, 407 N. Pearl St., Joplin, Mo.

CAPT. JACK BONAVITA and "English Jack of the Congo." Also Mr. Ford (Ford's Ostrich Farm, Tampa, Florida).—Address ROBERT HYDE, care of *Adventure*.

JACK MANZEY, former pal. Last heard of Kansas City four years ago.—Address JOHN R. COOK, 1519 Brooklyn Ave., Kansas City, Mo.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

FRANK KERNOHAN, last heard of in Greenwood, B. C., seventeen years ago. Scar over right eye.—Address MRS. H. E. Dow, Fort Fairfield, Maine.

LOTE (GOLDEN) SHERWOOD, last heard of Salt Lake City, 1912. Height 5 ft. 3 in., brown curly hair. Address TOM GIBBONS, Tonopah, Nevada.

SHIPMATES Hamburg-America Line tramp *Sarnia* New York to Frontera, Mexico, June 2nd to 21st, 1913.—Address R. L. CONNER, 517 N. Union St., Kokomo, Ind.

EDWARD G. BROWN, last heard of "The Dalles Country," Oregon.—Address JEFF D. BURKE, 136 Stuyvesant Place, St. George, Staten Island, N. Y.

HARRY R. FIELDS, last heard of when we landed in New York City coming home from Panama. Think he is around Pueblo, Colo.—Address HENRY H. VANECEK, 178 3rd St., Passaic, N. J.

GUST RHODE, left Grant County, Minn., eleven years ago.—Address JOHN RHODE, Herman, Minn.

CHARLES N. TURNER, of Monterey, Mexico. Father dead, mother needs him.—Address MRS. L. D. TURNER, 719 Ogden St., San Antonio, Texas.

GOSTA LARSSON, left Stockholm, Sw., Jan. 1911. Last heard of Campbell River, B. C.—Address BERTIL LINDH, Bridgewater, N. S., Canada.

RECKLESS, where are you? Important! Your home is broken up.—Address L. T. 258.

WILLIAM McCLELLAN, went to Kimberley, South Africa, thirty-five years ago from Wilkes-Barre, Pa. Last heard of in Kimberley on Du Toits Pan.—Address P. H. MCCLELLAN, 150 West Fourth St., Williamsport, Pa.

DALE L. YOUNG, son, disappeared from Washington, D. C., Aug. 12, 1914. Think in Pittsburg.—Address MRS. HARLEY J. MOTZ, 1006 Elm St., Rochester, Ind.

FRANK E. PELLOWS, formerly Gov. Surveyor Indian Terr., 1896-97-98. Last heard of Atlin, B. C., 1899.—Address GEO. H. MEEK, 3317 Allen Ave., Sacramento, Cal.

Inquiries will be printed three times. In the January and July issues all unfound back names will be printed again.

AUGUST FREDERICK SPIERING, father. Has Captain's license on whaler. Supposed at sea.—Address LILLIAN SPIERING, Veterans' Home, Napa County, Cal.

M. E. SNIDER, last heard of Waco or Corpus Christi, Texas.—Address I. A. SNIDER, S. P. Passenger Depot, Salem, Oregon.

JAMES R. PETTIT, soldier, 1896 at Ft. Thomas and Alaska. Last heard of Spring, 1908. Canadian papers please copy.—Address E. M. VAN ORMAN, 2 East 20th St., Covington, Ky.

DON, you have made a terrible mistake and caused much suffering.—Address PETE, care of *Adventure*.

DAN MEADE, Napa Business College 1908-09. Home once near Buffalo.—Address L. T. 256.

THE following have been inquired for in full in the January and February issues of *Adventure*. They can get name of inquirer from this magazine.

BEDELL, PERCY JOHN; Bolton, Leonard; Comfort, James; Dunn, Ralph; Gillbertson, Joseph; Jefferson, Carl (Jeff); Lear, John, of Everett, Wash.; Leslie, Blayney; Moreland, John L., of Arizona; Morrow, Carl F.; Nelson, Fred; Rya, Carol D.; Roach, Henry; Tibbitson, George D.; Wilson, Col. Robert B.

MISCELLANEOUS. Veterinary surgeon, Indianapolis, Crowley, La.; Members of Madero's Foreign Legion, during 1911; Urita; Goff, or Geof, navy man at China station; all members of Co. M—1—2.

NUMBERS 56, 68, 73, 76, W 93, W 140, W 150, W 153, W 183, W 184, W 189, W 195, W 203, W 211, W 212, W 215, C 189, C 205, L. T. 207, L. T. 239. Please send us your present addresses. Letters forwarded to you at addresses given us do not reach you.—Address A. S. HOFFMAN, care of *Adventure*.

RANDOLPH H. ATKIN, please send us your present address. Mail sent to you at addresses given us doesn't reach you.—Address A. S. HOFFMAN, care of *Adventure*.

THOMAS TRACY, Paso del Macho, Mexico. Mail sent to above address does not reach you. Please send present address.—Address A. S. HOFFMAN, care *Adventure*.

MANUSCRIPTS sent us by the following are being held by us, having been returned to us as unclaimed at the addresses furnished:

W. Lynch, Trenton, N. J.; W. Mack, Pacheca, Mexico; Dorothy Bayless, Adams Co., Ohio; Henry W. Edwards, New York; W. G. Gormley, Ontario, Canada; George Stillons, Chicago, Ill.; Francis Manston, Chicago, Cal.; James Perry, Brooklyn, N. Y.; P. Spanjaart, Montreal, Que., Can.

IMPORTANT NOTICE: As announced before, every item will be published three times, then taken out. But in the *January* and *July* numbers of each year we will publish the names of all who have been inquired for and remain unfound.

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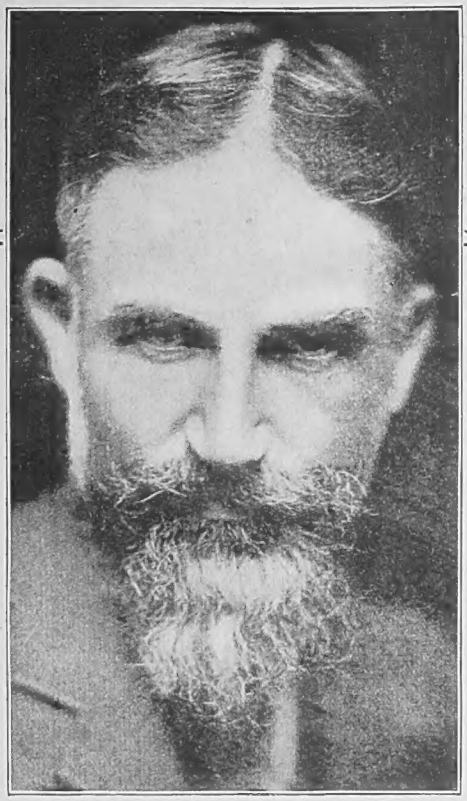

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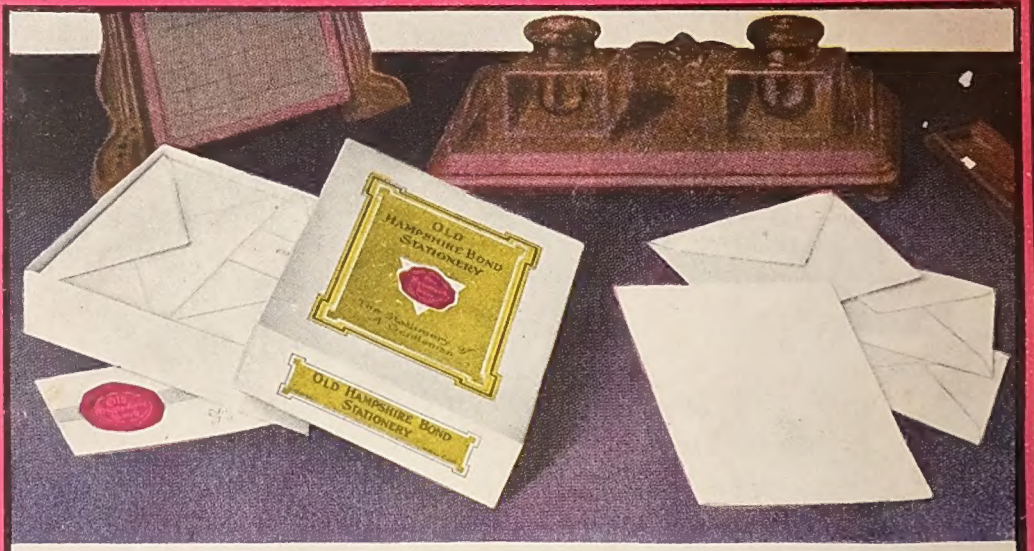

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